DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 128 088 PS 008 771

AUTHOR Whitley, Esstoya; And Others
TITLE From Time to Time: A Record of Young Children's Relationships with the Aged. Research Monograph No. 17.
INSTITUTION Florida Univ., Gainesville. P. K. Yonge Lab. School.
PUB DATE Mar 76
NOTE 100p.
AVAILABLE FROM P. K. Yonge Laboratory School, 1080 S.W. 11th Street, Gainesville, Florida 32611 (no charge)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$4.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Affective Behavior; Changing Attitudes; Death; Diaries; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Students; Emotional Response; Grandparents; *Human Relations; *Learning Experience; *Nursing Homes; Observation; *Older Adults; *Special Programs; Young Adults
IDENTIFIERS *Adopted Grandparents; Aging

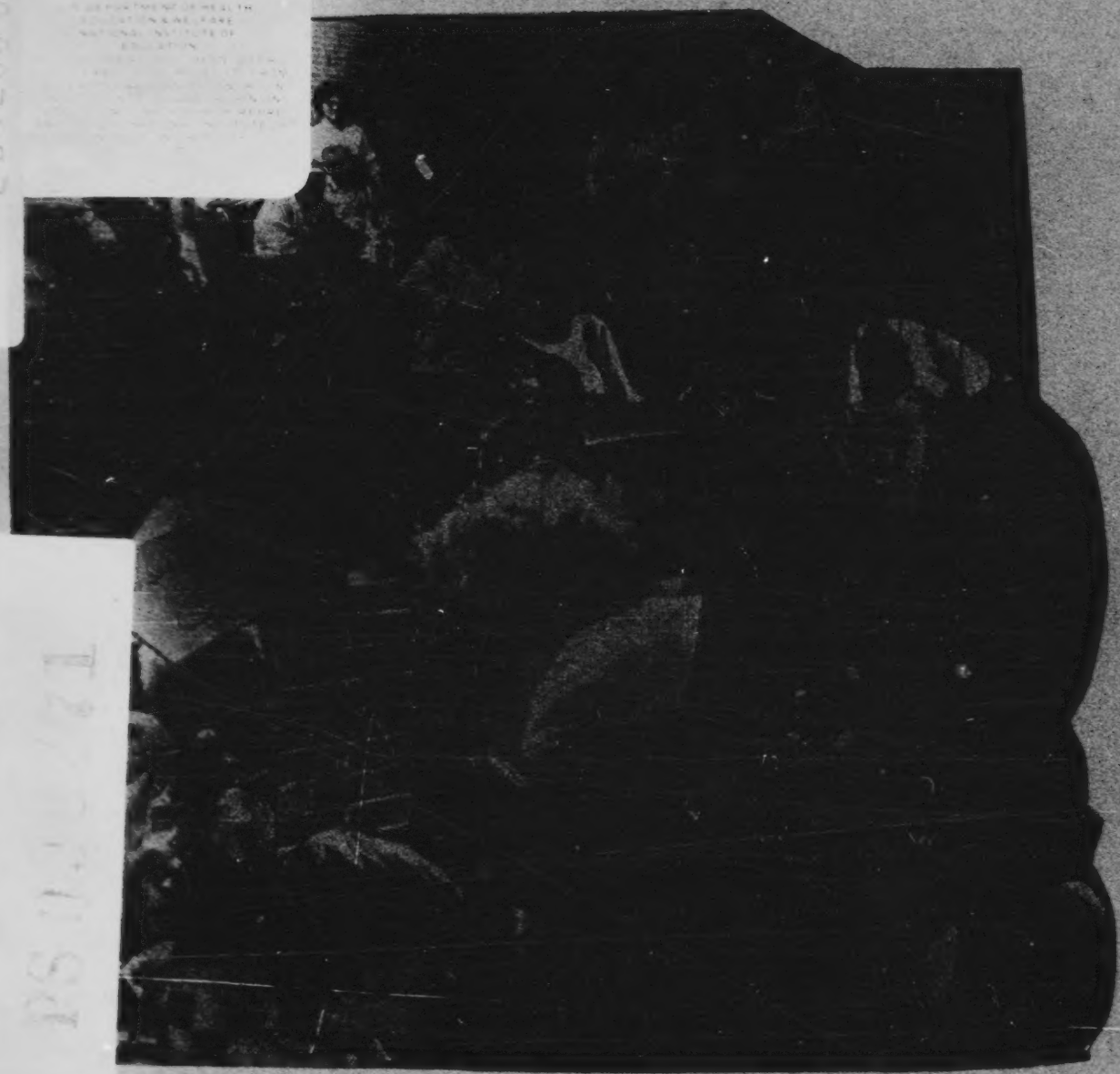
ABSTRACT

This is an informal report of an Adopted Grandparents program begun in 1968 to provide mutually enriching experiences for young children in a classroom and elderly residents in a nursing home. There were 13 adopted grandparents averaging 77 years of age and thirty 6-, 7-, and 8-year-old children. Objectives were to stimulate sharing of talents, knowledge and skills, to encourage caring and helping relationships and to help children recognize and accept the aging process. The children visited the nursing home regularly, wrote letters and read to grandparents, helped plan parties, music, games, and arts and crafts activities and planted a flower garden. A detailed log book was kept which included happenings, conversation and comments of the children, the elderly and the nursing home staff. During the 1974-75 school year a study was conducted to identify the effects of the program on children's attitudes toward the elderly. Pretests and posttests were given to children in the program and to a control group. Although no statistical differences were found between the two groups, it appeared that both the adopted grandparents and the children benefited from the contact and that the experimental group more frequently had attitude changes in a positive direction toward elderly persons. (MS)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED123088

FROM TIME TO TIME: A Record



of Young Children's Relationships with the Aged

P. K. Yonge Laboratory School
College of Education
University of Florida
Gainesville 32611

P. K. Yonge Laboratory School

Research Monograph No. 17

Copyright March, 1976

F R O M T I M E T O T I M E :

A RECORD OF YOUNG CHILDREN'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE AGED

Esstoya Whitley, Project Director

Ruth Duncan

Patricia McKenzie

with

Stephen Sledjeski

March, 1976

P. K. Yonge Laboratory School
College of Education
University of Florida
Gainesville 32611
(904) 392-1554

This public document was promulgated to disseminate information to public schools at an annual cost of $5398.10 or a per copy cost of $2.15.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

So many people have contributed in such fundamental ways to implementation of this project and preparation of this report that it is impossible to acknowledge all of their contributions. The benefits I have enjoyed from being associated with the project for the past eight years have been so profound that it is impossible for me to express the depth of gratitude I feel toward all those who have helped to make this one of the most personally enriching experiences of my professional life. As I have experienced the indescribable love, sorrow, joy, sadness, frustration, exhilaration, and pathos of my children and their "grandparents", as they have shared the vicissitudes of life and death, my own life has acquired new and deepened meaning.

It is not easy for a nursing home to create the institutional flexibility required for such a program as this to function. I am especially grateful to the several directors and social workers who have served the Hillhaven Convalescent Center for creating that level of flexibility. Mrs. Lynn Storti, the Social Director at the time the project was initiated, and Mr. Cook, the present director, have been especially helpful. I am equally grateful for the interest and support of all workers of the center.

Numerous university and high school student aides, student teachers, and parents have accompanied the children as they visited the Center. Miss Kristen Schiebler, a high school student, not only has become an able partner in directing the project during the past two years but she accepted full responsibility for its direction during the summer of 1975. Her loving support of the pupils and their parents has been a source of continuing inspiration.

To all of those not singled out in these acknowledgments, I apologize and express my heartfelt thanks.

Esstoya Whitley, Director
Adopted Grandparents Program

4

PREFACE

Between the emergence of life and its extination or translation lies the great range of occasions for valuing and supporting others and expressing love in its many guises. (3, p. 33)

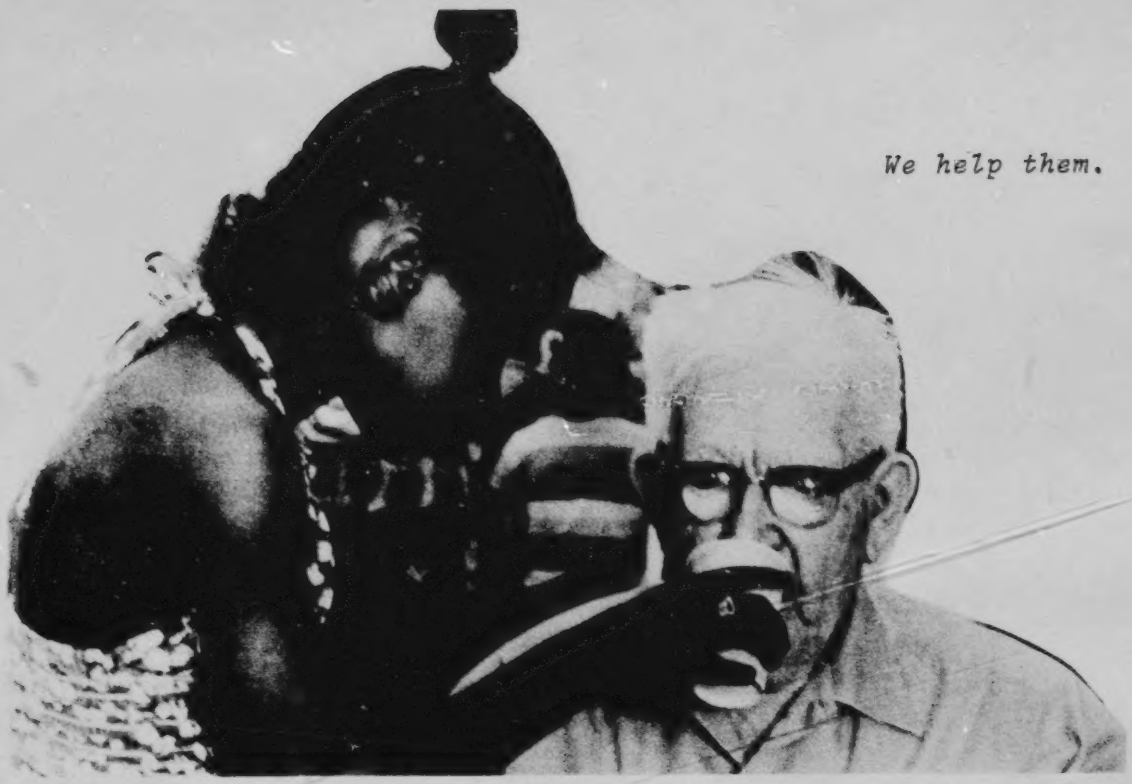
The Adopted Grandparents Program, described in this monograph, began in 1968. It was initiated by early childhood teacher Mrs. Esstoya Whitley on the premise that the elderly in our society are potentially a rich learning resource. Her purpose was to tap this resource to the benefit of the six-, seven-, and eight-year-old children enrolled in her classroom.

The program is sometimes confused with the government sponsored Foster Grandparents programs in operation in various places over the nation. "Foster Grandparents" focuses on employing retired people, generally from lower income brackets, who are still obviously active enough to contribute their need to be useful. As volunteers or employees they serve as tutors in classrooms, helpers to neglected or sick children in institutions, or aides to nurses visiting the home bound, or participants in other community services.

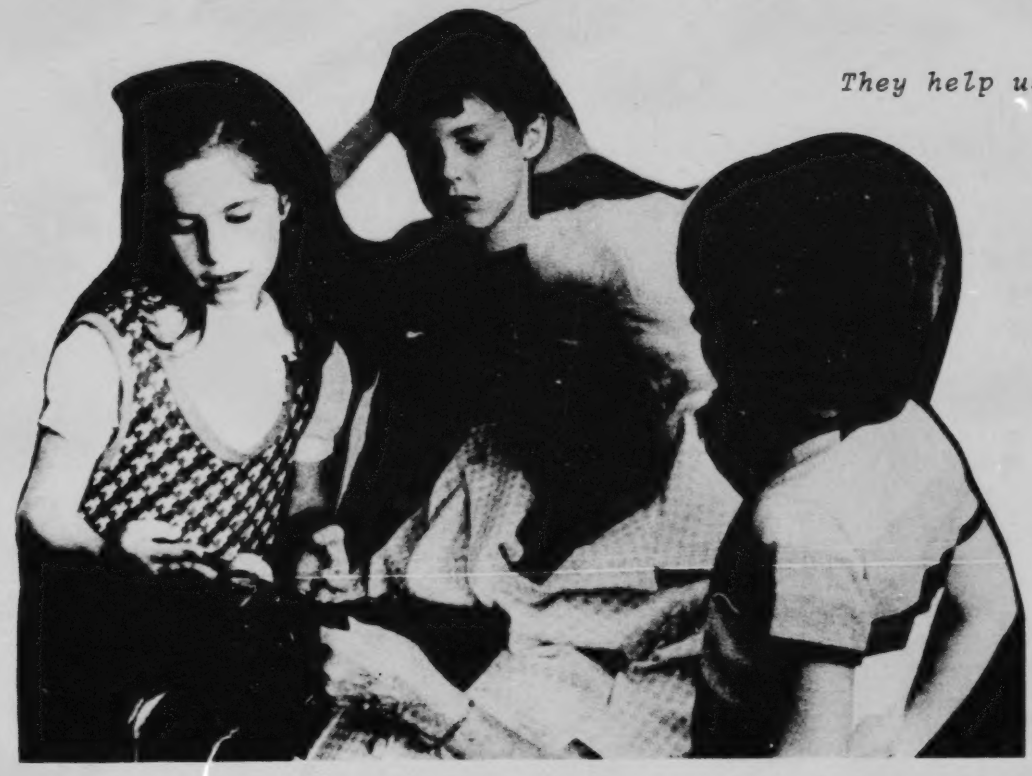
The Adopted Grandparents in the P. K. Yonge project are nursing home residents. Their average age ranges between seventy-five and eighty. They are "in residence" because they are not able to care for themselves physically, nor are their families--those who have families. One is blind. One must be fed. A stroke has robbed one of speech. Control of the elimination processes is limited for some and totally nonfunctioning for others. "Often ignored, even resented, they watch everything going faster and faster while they get slower and slower" (6, p. 8).

Nevertheless, Mrs. Whitley believed that through establishing a regular program of visitation, her children's lives would be enriched by the things these "old folks" could teach them, particularly about the "old times"--passing on the heritage. Further, she maintained that awareness of and sensitivity to all aspects of the human life cycle are essential to establishing realistic perceptions of the ages of man.

The creation of an environment in which all may continue to be stimulated to grow requires broad participation in the



We help them.



They help us.

lives and experiences of others. A full range of involvement must include the youngest and the oldest for optimum development of the personal self and identification with the human species. Limiting interaction predominantly to that which occurs with peers narrows the perceptual field and encourages stereotyped views of other age groups infrequently experienced directly.

In the beginning the residents were reluctant to be "adopted". "They'll just come and go away and never come back just like everyone else," one remarked. Although the individual children who visit from Mrs. Whitley's class have changed over the years as they have moved on to higher age levels, six-, seven-, and eight-year-old children still visit the "grandparents" at least three times a week.

Instead of "Do not cast me off in the time of old age; foresake me not when my strength is spent" (Psalm 71:9), the theme of the program is "Let us minister to one another." As talents and expertise are shared, prizing, loving feelings develop. Sharing is deep and warm, and both the old and the young are stimulated to do things which would not have been attempted otherwise. The loneliness, "an inevitable accompaniment to growing old . . ." (6, p. 11), is, at least to some degree, dispelled in the renewed usefulness of appreciated productiveness in contact with the young. To the young, growing old comes to be viewed "as just as much a part of life as is growing up" (4, p. 18). What is probably most significant of all, since there are more than 20,000,000 people over 65 in the United States, is the fact that these children who participate in this Adopted Grandparents Program acquire more positive attitudes toward the elderly than those who are not provided this opportunity.

Ruth Duncan, Coordinator
Research and Dissemination
P. K. Yonge Laboratory School

THE OTHER 999: A PROLOGUE

Said the thousand legged worm,
As he wiggled and he squirmed,
"Has anyone seen a leg o' mine?
Oh, if it can't be found,
I shall have to hop around
On the other nine-hundred-ninety-nine."

"Farethee well, farethee well,
Farethee well, oh leg of mine.
Oh, if it can't be found,
I shall have to hop around
On the other nine-hundred-ninety-nine."

Thousand Legged Worm

The day Grandma Songbird's leg fell off was not an ordinary day. We had gone to the nursing home to see our adopted grandparents. . . .

Aren't they your real grandparents?

Yes--we adopted them and they became our real grandparents. Some of us have grandparents at home and they are real too. There are different kinds of real.

I had a grandfather but he died.

People can be real even when they're dead.

You mean real ghosts, in Halloween costumes?

I mean real, but not ghosts. And costumes may not be just for Halloween.

When is a costume not a Halloween costume?

When you wear it every day. It looks real but it isn't. But you get used to seeing it and you forget it's a costume.

Grandma Songbird's leg is like that. It isn't real. It's part of a costume. When you don't have real teeth, you wear false teeth. When you don't have a real leg you wear an artificial leg. It helps you get around better.

How did Grandma Songbird's leg fall off?

With a thud.

How did Grandma Songbird feel when her leg fell off?

It didn't bother her. She showed us how the leg was attached above her knee. It was no big problem to fasten it again.

Didn't you think it was funny?

No, we were surprised, but we didn't think it was funny because it was Grandma Songbird's leg. If you didn't know Grandma Songbird and you just saw somebody's leg fall off, maybe you would think it was funny. Or maybe you would be scared.

Why didn't you laugh? Why weren't you afraid?

Because Grandma Songbird explained it to us, and she told us it happens sometimes.

Didn't you care that Grandma Songbird's leg fell off? You must have felt sorry for her!

When somebody's leg falls off you care, but you don't have to feel sorry for them. Besides, how can you feel sorry for Grandma Songbird? She sings all the time. That's why Grandpa Gibson said we should call her Grandma Songbird.

Who's Grandpa Gibson?

He's another grandparent our class adopted. He went home from the nursing home, but we still see him sometimes.

How can you adopt a grandparent? People adopt kids. They don't adopt grandparents.

We did. It may not be an ordinary thing but we did it.

You said the day Grandma Songbird's leg fell off was not an ordinary day. That must be why it wasn't an ordinary day--because her leg fell off, right?

Wrong. It wasn't an ordinary day because it was a day we visited our adopted grandparents at the nursing home. We go there a lot, but it never seems like an ordinary day when we go. It's a special day for us and a special day for them.

And it's not an ordinary day when they come to see us in our classroom. The college kids push them over in wheelchairs or bring them in cars and sometimes we have a party. At our last party we sang a song. It was about a centipede: you know, one of those things with all the legs. I guess one of his legs fell off, too, because the song said he would have to make do with the other 999.

CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
PREFACE	iii
THE OTHER 999: A PROLOGUE	vi
FROM TIME TO TIME: A RECORD OF YOUNG CHILDREN'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE AGED	1
WE'RE ALL MEMBERS OF ONE ANOTHER	1
PUT IT WITH THE OTHERS	2
SMILE AND TOUCH ARE "WORDS", TOO	9
THEY CAME AND FOUND US	12
IN THE BEGINNING	17
A JOYFUL NOISE	22
IT'S BEEN FUN! I'LL WRITE	25
YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN	36
OUR ECHOES ROLL	42
EDUCATION OF THE SPIRIT: AN EPILOGUE	61
APPENDIX - PROJECT SUMMARY and DATA ANALYSIS	70
REFERENCES	89
Table 1	87
Table 2	88

F R O M T I M E T O T I M E :

A RECORD OF YOUNG CHILDREN'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE AGED

WE'RE ALL MEMBERS OF ONE ANOTHER

I wish no one had to get old. This comment by an elementary school child who had visited an elderly friend reminds us that time imposes its restrictions on us all. A nursing home can be a prison. A school can also be a prison. The young look restlessly for escape from encircling walls; the old move through their memories as through the darkened rooms of an old house.

But what if the doors are flung open? What if a child is freed from traditional school boundaries to leap over the wall of a nursing home and establish friendships that defy the categories of time? Will he be dismayed by what he sees? Hans Christian Anderson was once terrified by the touch of a madwoman in the hospital whose garden his grandmother tended, but he profited much from his visits with the old people: "he liked visiting the old women who spent their last years there spinning" (8) and his imagination was greatly influenced by the tales he heard from them as a child.

One boy, perhaps appalled by the sufferings of an aged relative, declined to participate in the nursing home visits of his schoolmates; similarly, an old woman who valued her own routine continued to watch the television programs which conflicted with the children's visits. An absence of pressure frees old and young from the burden of a reluctantly assumed obligation. The freedom NOT to participate without a lessening of self-esteem is essential to the success of the program described in these pages.

In Tom's Midnight Garden, a classic of modern children's literature, Tom discovers that--in addition to being a person in his own right--he is also a character in an old woman's dream. In the dream landscape, both alike are young. Perhaps he was fortunate to learn so early in life the secret that we are all members one of another.

PUT IT WITH THE OTHERS

The Roman de la Rose, a poetic masterpiece of the Middle Ages, displays illness, poverty and old age among the figures that bar entry into the garden so eagerly sought by the lover. The fact that these allegorical figures appear alongside representations of various sins may reflect an ancient tendency to associate old age and poverty with faults of character and to judge them as if they were, indeed, moral shortcomings. In The Other America, Michael Harrington has drawn attention to the still-common inclination to equate poverty with shiftlessness. It may be that, in a less conscious fashion, old age receives a similar moral stigma in the minds of youth-oriented Americans. The garden of leisure we seek is not that of a fulfilled old age but that of a self-indulgent youth persuaded that romantic love depends on consumption of products trumpeted in endless advertisements . . . advertisements which seldom feature the old, unless they are to be identified with the fortyish women who hopefully apply hair dyes and face creams. ("You're not getting older, you're getting better": what exactly is the opposition of concepts expressed in these words?) The Lawrence Welk show, which cultivates an older audience, gives minimal space to such products, highlighting remedies of a more or less medical nature. Though professionalism and dignity characterize this show, the products of its sponsors are often a variation on the quest for endless youth.

If our media's more positive approaches to old age betray this latent dismay, it is not too surprising to find that a dread of aging is commonplace and is, at times, reminiscent of the disgust attaching to poverty and illness (which frequently accompany it) and numerous vices (which may not). How free is the P. K. Yonge project of negative concepts about aging? A major emphasis of the project, of course, is to foster a positive view of aging. Above and beyond the optimistic framework of the program, the children sometimes bring positive expectations of their own and act upon these expectations in a manner which might startle some adults.

Expectations of what children can accomplish turn into self-fulfilling prophecies; a child labeled as a slow learner obligingly provides evidence to support the claim. Old people are likewise vulnerable to the limiting effects of their society's expectations. Accepting the low estimate of their abilities so often signaled by society in general and by solicitous or impatient relatives in particular, they may fail to exercise potential they still possess or to develop potential they have not explored in earlier life.

One feature of the P. K. Yonge school-nursing home project is the extent to which it fosters a questioning attitude toward stereotyped expectations. Children, once freed of the pressures of negative expectations regarding their own achievement, seem able in turn to act on high expectations of what others can achieve. To a middle-aged adult, such expectations can seem unrealistic; as they begin to be realized, however, the onlooker is forced to reexamine his ideas about what the elderly--even the handicapped elderly--can actually do.

Examples of high expectations fostering unexpected achievement are presented by the following situations: on a small scale, by a blind woman's success in making holiday decorations; on a larger front, by a stroke patient's unusual progress in her speech when aided by children.

First, a description of Chuck's teaching of Grandma Songbird, the resident who has taught the children so much about living with multiple handicaps:

> *He would give her materials and describe in detail. Grandma Murphy heard him. She said, "She is blind and can't do those things--thinking that Chuck didn't know that she was blind. He said, "Yeah, I know, but she is making an Easter basket and a rabbit." He was so patient and kind--she did make a basket and rabbit. When she finished, he asked if he should take it to her room. She said, "Oh no, put it with the others so everyone can enjoy it."*

Put it with the others! If we could learn to do this with the elderly group in our population, perhaps we could overcome the impoverishment our society suffers by ostracizing the handicapped and the aged.

The speech therapy with Grandma Phillips, a project initiated by the children themselves, called for a longer-term effort. On April 2, it is recorded that *the children think they are going to teach her to talk again.* The entry for April 11 notes that *she isn't talking much more, but the children think that she is.* But later entries point to actual progress made:

> *4/13 Holt and David were super "speech therapists" today. They worked with Grandma Phillips almost an hour getting her to talk--she actually counted to ten--said boy and no. (Mrs. Storti said they were as helpful as the paid workers with her.)*

She tries harder for them.

4/25 She counted more with the children--they are really helping her learn to talk--she remembered the egg hunt and with a big smile told me how many eggs she found.

4/27 The children are really helping her to learn to talk again--she tries harder for them.

4/30 Grandma Phillips was waiting as usual--talked more--said more words--counted to twenty with the children. The girls got a drum for her to beat while we sang--she actually tried to sing words with us.

Those who have seen at first hand the lethargy and despair that can overcome a stroke patient will find it hard to remain unmoved by this evidence of the children's persevering concern. Perhaps more impressive than the small but definite gains that resulted is the tie of attachment underlying the effort and appearing elsewhere in the project again and again.

Giving these manifestations of affection their due, and recognizing that increased information (as well as love) can help cast out fear of the aging process, can one conclude that a higher esteem for old people has resulted from the project? Logbook comments emphasize the affection between children and old people, and they suggest a reduction of grim concepts about aging. The positive expectations of the children themselves and of the project as a whole, however, do not necessarily indicate that esteem for the aged (as distinct from affection for certain elderly people) resulted from project activities.

A more potent impact upon the reader of the log results from the overwhelmingly constant expressions of appreciation by the old people. These expressions, intended doubtless to drive home the value of the project, produce a curiously undermining effect--casting doubts not so much on the project itself as on whatever forces in our society have combined to make these old people so pathetically grateful for attention.

On one occasion the logbook account of an old person's appreciation demands a critical response. Children had pushed two residents in wheelchairs the few blocks from nursing home to school:

We were shocked when Grandma Morgan said, "This is the first time I've been for a walk since I've been here--it's a real treat--it's like a letter from home--it's my Thanksgiving gift--I'll sleep well after this great trip." Mrs. Willis said, "I haven't been this far before--I wouldn't know how to get back." The

boys were thrilled to get to push them in wheelchairs--great fun! When they realized how much it meant to the grandparents, they were very happy . . . It was real fun for the boys, and they felt good that they had made the grandparents so happy.

This incident throws light on the restrictions surrounding the old even in well-regulated nursing homes which maintain their premises in good condition, provide nourishing food, TV sets, games, and other activities, but must depend on relatives or volunteer help to provide a change of scene for the residents. When freedom of movement is so sharply curtailed, it is easy to regard the old from a benevolent, even patronizing standpoint.

Despite the project's rejection of a "do-good" orientation, it is hard to escape the impression that the old people remain objects of pity (or at least solicitude) in the minds of adults associated with the project. The children, on the other hand, seem more inclined to view those elderly with whom they become closely associated as objects of esteem, persons of recognized authority and superior culture who merit respect as well as affection. The project logbook is a record of happy and useful visits to a nursing home by a group of schoolchildren. At the same time, it is an indictment of our society's attitudes toward the aged as numerous anecdotes record the gratefulness of the elderly for the attention received from the young--attention obviously unexpected.

Florida, where the fountain of youth was once sought, has become a retirement center for older people from all over the nation. Beneath our exuberant foliage, old people, often solitary, walk with effort through crowds that move more rapidly than they do. What do people do to pass the time when they are old? Those of us conditioned to believe that old age begins at thirty find it hard enough to imagine that life continues during middle age. How shall we form an accurate picture of the daily activities of the elderly?

One interesting feature of the project logbook is its recreation of the interests and routines of a number of elderly people. Many of these interests are such that they include rather than exclude others, but their repetitious quality may serve to reinforce a common stereotype that old people are inflexible, "set in their ways." Within their preferred routines, however, possibilities for new learning do arise. One old woman remarked that "it's time for me to learn a new game," and was taught by the children how to play checkers. Another resident expressed disappointment on two occasions because the children had not carried out their promise to teach her chess. This is exceptional; most of the time the children seemed to follow up very well on projects undertaken

with their older friends, and it is clear that the various interests of nursing home residents offer a means of communicating across a "generation gap".

Though the children created a certain stimulation by their initiative in coming to the home, by no means do all the activities carried out represent interests exported from outside. In some cases the children adapt themselves to already existing interests. In only one case, when the adult nature of the interest (a television show) ruled out participation by children, was contact between the children and their older friend diminished.

Like the patchwork quilts some of them used to make, the interests of the residents form a varied pattern. One old woman loves to play games and carries the competitive spirit of youth into the pastimes of age. Another prefers to sing hymns and read religious material. The children do not always know the hymns, but they listen with interest. One old man likes to reminisce about his work for a railroad company. Though he is more of an invalid than some of the other residents, he remains a dominant personality in the group. Another old man, a former actor, creates a perpetual holiday atmosphere that infuses the logbook's terse entries with unusual warmth and charm--but no particular activity seems to account for this effect.

Day after day the logbook records how each resident, with a few children at hand, carries out certain characteristic activities. *Grandma Murphy's inexhaustible zest for checkers draws the children toward the game happily, even when (as so often happens) they lose. Grandma Bennett continues to find in religious songs and stories a means to see more clearly and communicate more vividly to others some vision that is brightened rather than dimmed by repetition of the same cadences, the same images. Grandpa Crevasse also sings, but his songs reflect a life of toil on the railroads. (One night, dreaming that he is going to be late for work, he suffered an injury while climbing out of bed.) Another old man, Grandpa Gibson, seems immune to the claims of a workaday world . . . or perhaps his acting talent, retained in old age, allows him to create that illusion.*

As visit follows visit and the logbook entries accumulate, distinct personalities emerge. The repetition of activities and situations, far from obscuring these personalities, throws a sharper light upon them. Less distinct are the personalities of the children not having lived long enough to form the preferences and traits that can be so striking in older people. Of interest to the educator is the question of what formative influence is impressed upon them by the sometimes powerful and discordant temperaments that surround them. An allied question is whether this influence (whatever

it may be) is diluted or strengthened at that point in the project when children are no longer "assigned" to a certain resident but are encouraged to mingle freely with all the elderly participants in the program.

SMILE AND TOUCH ARE "WORDS", TOO

W. B. Yeats, whose works reflect so deep a dismay at the effects of time, declared that "words alone are certain good." Nonverbal communication, however, challenges us to reappraise this judgment, which so often lies at the heart of our educational processes. At times, the message transmitted in a nonverbal manner seems to contradict the actual circumstances under which it is sent. Consider, for example, a dream about a grandmother who spent her last days in a nursing home. When last seen, she was suffering from a disability that limited her movements and made speech difficult. In the dream, however, the face that looks through the nursing home window is smiling with a steadfastness that radiates victory and strength. The dreamer awakens haunted by a conviction that the dream has expressed a truth more powerful than the reality usually accessible to our sight.

Some of the descriptions in the logbook reveal limitations in our daily perspective and point to a communication that transcends these limitations. On an obvious level, age itself ceases to constitute a barrier: *Grandpa Dupree is very quiet when adults come in, but talks and laughs when he is alone with the children.* This phenomenon is easily accounted for, one might say; some adults, like Lewis Carroll, are more at ease with children than with other grown-ups. But other phenomena are less easily explained.

Grandpa Dupree and the children are, at least, speaking the same language. But the logbook contains instances of communication that occur across language barriers, whether imposed by a physical disability or by a differing culture.

> *A woman from Greece (doesn't speak any English) has seen us coming and going for a couple of weeks. She keeps smiling and looking as if she wanted to visit with children. Today she came in reception room where we wait and stood nearby. Children walked over and touched her--with a tremendous smile she leaned over and kissed each one on the cheek. Some got in line for seconds. This was truly a beautiful experience. They communicated through smiles and love.*

A later entry tells us that *Danni is sure she is communicating with her even if they do not speak the same language.* On a following visit, however, the communication between Danni and her older friend was curtailed by the effects of an injury:

Danni was able to cheer her up but not like usual . . . We think the problem is being restrained in a chair--she had fallen out and hurt her knee. She kept pulling at the cloth. Nurses were glad Danni came. "If anyone can help it is Danni."

But the final entry reverses this impression of sadness with a description of the Greek lady's waving enthusiastically at the project supervisor. *People in the Home had never seen her wave before.*

This is the last glimpse the logbook gives us of the woman from Greece, who has since died. Her name was never recorded in the log, though she wrote it down for the children, but she creates an unforgettable impression in the five brief entries that mention her. At the end, no longer depressed, she is seen waving joyfully to the person who had made possible a contact with youth and freedom. Whether happy or sad, she is one of those who can communicate across barriers of language as well as age.

Grandma Songbird's blindness does not prevent her from knowing who her friends are without a need for words. It is uncanny, but she takes a hand, and if it is the hand of someone she knows, she can tell who it is without a word being said. Grandma Phillips' speech impairment, which yielded some limited improvement to the children's efforts at therapy, fails to cut off her animated nonverbal conversations with them. The woman from Greece had her own way of communicating across a language difference that (like Grandma Phillips' speech handicap) could have isolated her from others. In all three of these cases, the overwhelming impression is not one of helplessness; it is one of joy. The sense of community created by these visits makes possible modes of communication that do not depend on words. Through smiling and touching fellowship grows, allowing a freer movement of the spirit than words alone can give.

Four different ages; four distinct stages of life are caught by the snapshot. As we try to decide which stage is best or truest, perhaps we must turn away from the human faces to look at the flowers--not only with regret for their evanescence but also with rejoicing for their color and life.

22

THEY CAME AND FOUND US

The fewer significant relationships an individual has at any point in his life the more importance he is likely to place on those relationships. This appears to be true of people of all ages. The young child completely dependent on his parents and without other associations has an encompassing, sometimes overwhelming "love" for them and is greatly threatened if removed from the parents even temporarily. Widowed mothers or mothers of an only child are sometimes considered "over-protective". Patrol car partners, co-pilots on planes, or engineers on trains become strongly attached to each other because virtually all their working hours are spent with those individuals, and perhaps their safety is dependent upon them. On the other hand, people who have a large number of interactions with customers or clients--beauticians, or lawyers--may put less importance on a single relationship (with a partner or colleague). In a successful career a person may find compensation for an unhappy family life--or in satisfying family relationships one may find compensation for career failures.

In our society the number of significant social interactions gradually increases during one's childhood and youth, probably reaching a peak in "middle age," and greatly declining as maturity of children and retirement influence one's life. Many older citizens in our society, particularly those in convalescent homes, have few significant relationships. They may become attached to a nurse or attendant who is kind to them, but sometimes seem cautious in developing close ties with fellow residents whom they know might soon die. If contacts with relatives are infrequent, they seem to protect themselves by not hoping for too much. Society has not mandated that all youngsters be affectionate to them as it has said their own children should be, so the attention they receive from the school children is unexpected, "safe". Further, since there are few if any other significant relationships to compete, the relationship established with "adopted" grandchildren is very important. As Grandma Clark expressed it, *My 'grandchildren' are really very special because they came and found us.*

"Grandpa" Crevasse had to be moved to the hospital. He cried when he left the nursing home saying, *But when will I see my boys?* "His boys" went to visit him, taking Valentines and letters. He introduced them to other patients as his grandsons. The supervisor in charge of his ward was careful not to tell that the boys were not really his grandchildren or that, as a matter of fact, he had never even been married. Sheding big tears, he thanked the boys over and over for coming.

Among the letters to Mrs. Willis was the following from Jonathan:

> *Dear Grandma Willis*
>
> *I hope you get better soon. I know you will feel better when you get out of the hospital. Everybody wishes you weren't sick. Maybe when you get better you can come to see us. Some of the kid's want to adopted you. I bet you will like it.*
>
> *love Jonathan*

All the children in the class wrote "get well" letters to Grandma Hamm when she went to the hospital. Since she was in intensive care, only the teacher was allowed to deliver the "mail". Her response was, *You mean you and the children even found me away up here?*

The director of the nursing home reports that the interaction with the children causes the "adopted grandparents" to show more interest in their appearances, have better appetites, and complain less. *Those children can get those 'grandparents' to do things no adult could possibly get them to do. Joy* [the teacher] *and her 'children' fill our 'home' with a love, excitement, and happiness that brings life to many otherwise lonely and lifeless elderly patients.*

The children come to visit on a regular continuous basis from two to three times a week as a matter of fact. When they are not present, the rejuvenation of the "grandparents" carries over into a sharing with one another. Whereas previously there was little the patients could find to talk about together, they now have a common framework in the children. Conversation is enlivened as they are stimulated to recall highlights from their own lives. *They make us feel young again.*

Apparently, their renewed liveliness and enthusiasm has some effects on relatives as well. Visits and letters from relatives have become more frequent and obviously less token. Having observed the actions the "adopted" children take in achieving responses, the blood relatives follow suit. Thus, they discover that there are things to talk about and to do with their elderly parents or grandparents to make the visit truly enjoyable. As a consequence, the lives of the visitors and the visited are enriched and the affection displayed is warmly close.

The elderly have much to give, but, like "The prophet who is not without honor, except in his own country," too often those closest are the last to recognize it. Take Grandpa Gibson for instance--a favorite of the children. He used to be in movies and is delightful telling his stories to

the children. He also enjoys hearing them read and helping them with their math. Shared craft activities are a favorite, too. *I can eat anytime, but I can't make Valentines with my children anytime.*

The lives of some of the residents have been quite long--the average ranging between seventy-five and eighty. Birthday celebrations in the high nineties are not uncommon. The teacher's logbook records a number of such occasions similar to that which occurred on Friday, May 16:

> *We went down to celebrate Grandma Howard's birthday. She was so happy. We made a huge six-foot cake; also individual cards and bought roses--a really big day for us. Children kept telling her that she only looked 50 years old. She is 96. Other grandparents enjoyed the party. David and Michael went to the rooms of those who couldn't come to the patio for the party and sang for them. They have started requesting that the boys come by each time we visit and sing for them. The boys have accepted this as a special thing that they can contribute and have started practicing their songs before they go. Other residents of the home have started coming out in the hall so they can hear, also.*

The children had parties for Grandma Howard's ninety-seventh and ninety-eighth birthdays. She may not make the ninety-ninth. Seeing her recently when she returned from two weeks in the hospital, the children, for the very first time, noticed, *Oh, Mrs. Whitley, she's gotten old. What is different about her,* they were asked quietly outside her door. *She doesn't have her teeth in. . . . She doesn't have her glasses on.*

Whereas Grandma Howard had always been precisely dressed --with every strand of her white hair in place--greeting the children cheerfully at the door, she now lay still, clothed in a hospital gown. She looked so frail and was identifiable only by the wrist band bearing her name. There was no indication that she recognized the children or was even aware of their presence.

Dear Grandma Harward,
HAPPY BIRTHDAY! I wish
you have a happy Birthday
we will come to see
you this affter noon
we have planed a
big surprise for
you I'll see you
this affter noon.
we have presents for you
and all sorts of
things for you

from
David W

IN THE BEGINNING

The P. K. Yonge School program of nursing home visits began in an informal fashion and acquired a life of its own which carried the participants into a new sense of community that cut across age and institutional barriers. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of experiences designed to help children in the primary school years relate to the aged in positive ways.

From its beginning in 1968, the program has highlighted personal needs and human relationships rather than efforts to measure information obtained as a result of continued interaction between young and old people. As the program has gone on, however, responsible observers have become aware of a potential for comparison between attitudes of children who have participated in the nursing home visits and of those who have not taken part in the program (see Appendix). For example, it was noticed that letters of condolence, written by children to a teacher whose father recently died, reflect the influence of the program. Those letters written by program participants tended to be longer and more detailed than letters received from nonparticipating children--even those considerably older than the participants. The letters were set apart not only by length but also by the extent to which they demonstrated concern for the bereavement suffered by their adult friend.

This example may raise the question as to whether a systematic program of nursing home visits by primary school children may foster a morbid preoccupation with death. As the letters of condolence indicate, an increased awareness of death is indeed produced by the program. Six nursing home residents known to the children have died since the visits began. It does not follow, however, that this heightened consciousness of death is an unwholesome one. By contrast, the common American practice of avoiding or sentimentalizing all references to death and bereavement may impress one as being obsessive. British author Jessica Mitford (7) has chronicled the extremes to which Americans sometimes go in their anxiety to escape a recognition of death, and the German novelist Heinrich Böll (1) has noted the horror with which Americans shrink from tombs and corpses.

The P. K. Yonge School-sponsored program of visits to nursing home residents was not planned with the purpose of exposing young children to death and to funeral customs. In retrospect, however, it appears that a resulting awareness of death has deepened the experience of these visits for some children. Now, with the program well established, it seems

An old man watches the
children whose eyes
are turned away from
him for the moment,
but a handclasp
unites him with
their circle.

proper to identify this area as a legitimate concern and to regard an increased understanding of the aging process--including death--as a valid purpose of the visits.

The children write their "grandparents" at least once a week, even though they visit together no less than twice during the same week. It is significant to note, too, that their immediate impulse in response to news of death is to write a letter of condolence. A case in point recently occurred when the mother of a peer in another classroom shot herself. Letters poured forth from these children to their friend. A discussion between letter writers in the Adopted Grandparent program and one from another classroom was overheard:

> *You shouldn't use 'died' in your letter. It will make him sad.*
>
> *But why not? It's real. It's life. Everybody is going to die sometime.*
>
> *Todd really is lucky. My mother died when I was two. He got to keep his until he was seven.*

What other purposes can be identified? Thought not officially stated in the formative stages of the program, various purposes have emerged as it has matured. For example, the nature of the project itself has assumed that children can profit from ties of friendship with much older people. It is a curious paradox that children, so often hide-bound about associating with other children two years older or younger than themselves, can enjoy a strong rapport with the very old. The stabilizing influence of the old and the vitalizing quality of the young provide mutual reinforcement. In our time, however, the circle is often broken; the family is reduced to a nuclear cell which is sometimes fragmented even further through divorce. More and more, older people are segregated in retirement colonies and nursing homes. A special effort is needed to break down this pattern of age segregation or to minimize its effects.

The P. K. Yonge School program of visits to nursing homes had its origin in a deliberate effort to bring children into contact with aged people. In addition to this general purpose, some related purposes have become apparent. An effort was made to assess the relative impact of the visits on children who previously had considerable contact with older people and those who had not. Conversely, it is interesting to note the effects of the children's visits on old people who have grandchildren or great-grandchildren of their own and those who do not. In each case--that of the segregated youngster and the segregated oldster--a truly "adoptive" process

We help them learn to talk.

We help them use their hands.

31

sometimes occurs. Spinster grandmothers and bachelor grandfathers discover the joys of parenthood; children surrounded by hard-working, sometimes harassed, parents encounter the serenity of old age.

But, one might object, who says that old age is serene? Even in our privileged country, it is all too often hounded by physical maladies and economic ills. At worst, the accumulated disappointments of years can sap the will to live; at best, a sense of diminishing time sets limits to hopes for the future. And what of the bad temper and forgetfulness that may accompany the aging process?

A realistic view of the problems of aging, while necessary as a sort of ballast for any ship that carries the commodity of hope, need not deter one from setting out on the voyage. A child whose gift is refused by an unaccountably cross old man will, of course, be distressed, but others in the program can divert the child's gifts--and attention--to someone who is ready to receive them.

In certain cases, it is possible to point to specific purposes that have been served by the program. The old person who follows up more vigorously in physical therapy when a child is helping, the child who makes startling progress in reading or in overcoming a nervous mannerism, provide evidence of the morale-lifting aspects of the interchange. While the unpredictable nature of such changes would seem to exclude them from a conscious setting of objectives, the fact that they sometimes occur is a reminder that a program, once set in motion, acquires a life of its own: a life which can exceed the expectations of its planners.

For the young, an elderly friend can be a link to past traditions and values; for the old, a young companion can represent the life-force of the future. Both participants may come to realize that the horizons of time are larger than originally supposed: life existed before I was here and it will continue when I am gone. Instead of a remote and terrifying vista, the prospect of time becomes humanized as it is linked with the past or future of a beloved individual. It is this largest purpose of all, the fitting of our own time into a pattern beyond time, that gives the greatest meaning to the Adopted Grandparents program.

> *Our adopted grandparents mean a lot to me. They help me learn a lot. too, They teach me how to play games. we teach them things too. Some of them have a stroke and some of them are blind. we help them use their hands' and we help the ones' that have a stroke. we help them learn how to talk. we help others. we write letters and make cards. we give partys and the grandparents give partys. I love them. by Sibylle*

A JOYFUL NOISE

Music plays an important role in the children's visits to the nursing home, but at Christmas it acquires special importance. Perhaps it plays an essential part in warding off the holiday depression that can strike with such force at inmates of an institution: *Grandma Wirrick needed the children today. She seems to be a bit depressed about Christmas--said that the children kept her from worrying. She seemed to be feeling better when we left.* Similarly, an entry on Grandma McClean notes: *Sybille and Marlene were really good for her. The holidays seem to depress her--she talks about family and friends from Georgia.*

Many of us look forward to holidays, but to those in institutions, especially if they are remote from friends and family, holidays can be an ordeal. An impression is left by the logbook that quite a few grandparents dreaded the holidays and looked forward to the post-holiday time when grandchildren, back in school, could resume their visits.

Readiness to join in song becomes a barometer of an individual's state of mind. Even a songbird refrains from singing after the death of her mate: *Chuck is really concerned about Grandma Songbird--she hasn't been coming out to work in crafts-room or out on patio to play and sing.* The log goes on to describe Chuck's efforts to draw her back into her accustomed surroundings.

At times we find in song a release for feelings that cannot be uttered in speech. On the day of Grandma Wirrick's funeral the children were unusually subdued, but they broke their silence to sing on the patio of the nursing home. Perhaps it comforted them, after learning of Grandma Glassboro's death, to recall that they had sung spirituals with her and Grandma Morgan for half an hour the previous day, in a song-fest that had also attracted a physical therapist at the home. The nursing home director's log records as her last memory of Grandma Glassboro her big smile as she was singing "Amen" with the children. She had spent some time in getting the "harmonies" just right and had finally succeeded in getting the sound she wanted from the children.

Song, as performance, appeared in duets by David and Todd. As the habit of singing became more entrenched, Michael and David began to practice regularly for it. On one occasion Grandma Morgan said, *I was starting to be jealous when I heard you singing down the hall--now I feel good that you came to see me and sing.* At times the older people accompanied the songs with musical instruments. A reader of the logbook may be amused by a child's assertion that he has "taught" an older person how to clap his hands, but it is clear that the joy in music-making was mutual, and that participation, not just performance, was highlighted. One grandmother taught the children a song called "Leap Frog Leap" and promised to think

of another song to teach them later. The elderly wife of a "grandfather" finds greater joy in her visits by coming at a time when the children are there. She plays the piano for them all to sing and in sharing this happy experience with her husband is enabled to leave him again for a while with spirits uplifted.

At the end of games, music sometimes provided a calm finale to the session. As in crafts, greater initiative appears to develop among older people over a period of time so far as musical effort was concerned, indicating a therapy more joyful than most.

IT'S BEEN FUN! I'LL WRITE.

A goodbye party was held in the classroom for Grandma Edwards. It is typical of the tact that has gone into this project that Mrs. Edwards' party was at the school in order that other residents in the nursing home would not be reminded of the painful fact that nobody was coming to take them home.

Mrs. Edwards, who is in her 80's, greeted outside visitors to the classroom graciously and was perfectly alert to everything going on around her. She was wearing a comfortable-looking but rather smart pantsuit and soft leather shoes. Her short, tidy hair was almost as white as the shoes, and a white shawl, which she later put on, was her only concession to "old-ladyism". She can walk with a little assistance. Though her skin is aged-looking, her general appearance (while in no way imposing) is free from marks of decrepitude.

37

Recognizing her name from the logbook as that of the participant who had wanted to give the class a quilting demonstration, she was asked if she did any quilting now. She replied that her arthritis prevented such work now but that during the Depression this skill and other sewing projects had been a real economic help when her husband had trouble finding enough work. Her comment recalled to mind the very practical purposes a craft can serve, aside from its value for self-expression or for non-drug-induced tranquillity. She recounted that she was the only person in her community at that time who could produce the "double wedding ring" quilt.

Fond as she is of sewing, it is not surprising that Mrs. Edwards singled out one "going away" gift in particular to show outside visitors: a pretty lap-robe that one of the children had made from squares of cotton, with some help from a parent. A number of the robes had been made by the children, but for some reason Mrs. Edwards had not been given one before. She seemed genuinely pleased with it.

The general impression created by the classroom was one of cheerful confusion. Balloons and a large banner gave a festive touch. Children milled here and there. Upon finishing their refreshments, they talked and played all over the room. Some surrounded the guest of honor; others pursued their own conversations in the background.

Mrs. Edwards did not seem to find the noise and constant motion, or the fact that when she spoke only a few of the children seemed to listen, bothersome.

It is important to note that even during the course of a normal class day, children in the school enjoy a high degree of freedom, following a goal setting session at the beginning of each day. On-lookers, accustomed to an atmosphere of quiet and order, might be inclined to feel that these children, though bright and appealing, would profit from a touch of discipline (of the noncorporal variety) and formality. On the other hand remembering days of school uniforms, the constant lining up, the feelings of awe that authority figures produced, these children would seem to be gainers in a sense. How fortunate that the director of the school can come in to pay his respects without producing an awed hush--or that these children feel no hesitancy about writing a letter to anyone when they feel so inclined.

Dear President Ford,
I hope you get better
I had a Sore throat.
and had to miss School.
We have 13 adopted
grandparents. Our class
goes to See them
almost everyday.
They live in a Nursing
Home close to our
School.

From Scott

Knowing of the President's plans to visit Gainesville, and without any initiative from the teacher, two boys decided they should write when illness caused the President to change his plans. Following suit, each member of the G139 class wrote of his concern to President Ford.

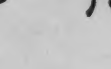
Dear President Ford,
i hope you will get well soon.
Wewereexcited about you coming
to the universidof Florida.
We are the best school in whole usa.
i sure do wish you could ~~and see~~ our school.
Happy Halleween.

love kim

Dear president Ford,

I hope you get well.

Halloween is coming soon and you will be sick. you won't be able to go trickortreating

And you won't be able to come to florida 

I hope I can see you.

From Veronica Aldana

The children, being accustomed to responses from others to whom they have written, were not at all surprised to receive personal acknowledgment from him.

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

November 6, 1975

Dear Girls and Boys:

Thank you for your messages of goodwill and concern. I am now feeling much better, and I can assure you that the thoughtfulness of so many good friends like you helped in my recovery.

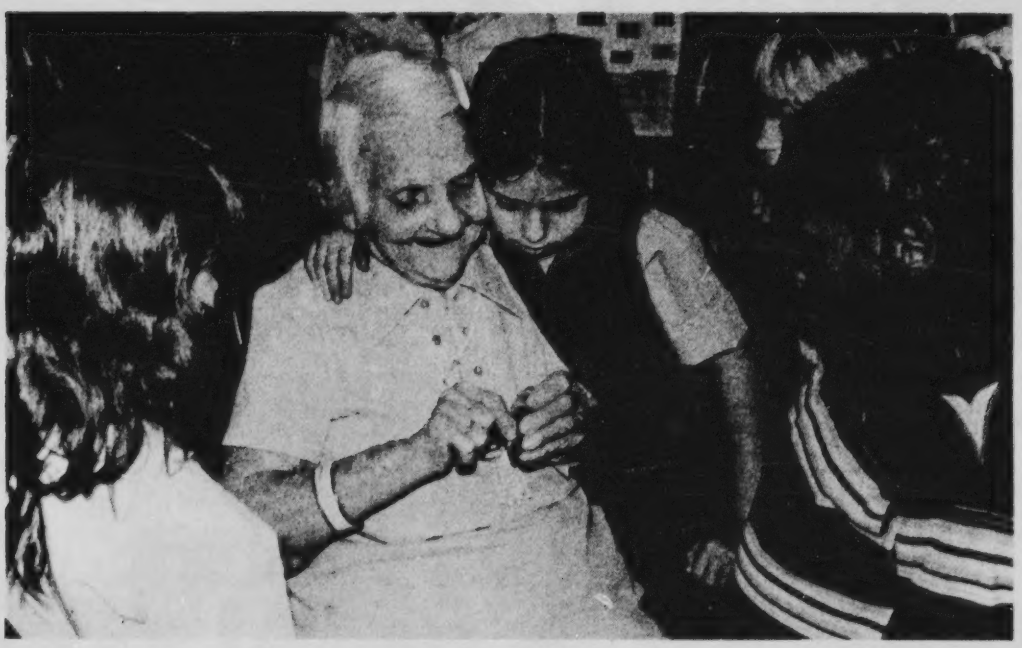
You have my best wishes.

Sincerely,

Gerald R. Ford

Pupils of Miss Whitley's
Class G-139
P. K. Yonge Laboratory School
University of Florida
1080 11th Street, SW.
Gainesville, Florida 32611

The genuine affection demonstrated for Mrs. Edwards during the party must be applauded. Children came up to hug their "grandmother". They gave her many gifts, ranging from primitive faces drawn on plastic cups to rather finished sewing projects. One little girl had given her a vivid colored clay object. In her genuine friendliness toward everyone present, "Grandma" Edwards showed it joyfully.



Since Mrs. Edwards lives in a nearby town, she will be able to see the children again. She made it a point to record the school's address so she could write to the children.

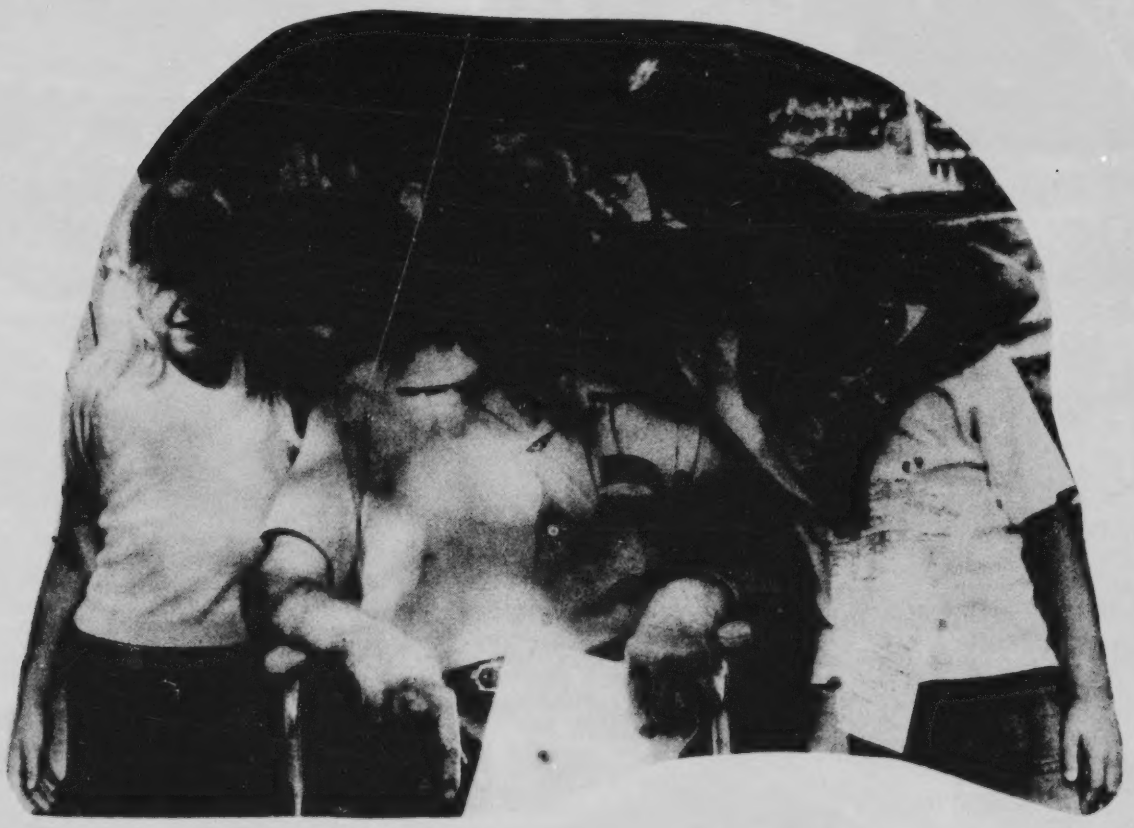
Music, then, rather than speech was used to interrupt the flux of activity and unite the children into a group. The children sang several songs for their grandmother including "Give Me That Old-Time Religion". One of the more appealing songs had to do with a centipede who injured his leg and was resigning himself to "making do" with the other 999. The song's little drama could be interpreted as a cheerful approach to limitations brought by age, but it has

enough charm of its own to be enjoyed without any such thought in mind.

Perhaps that song is a clue to the project: It offers possibilities for learning, but it also represents an enjoyable experience for children and old people. Perhaps the project requires no justification beyond that. The logbook records that on May 28,

> *When we were walking to the home, the boys were talking about their year and the visits to the Nursing Home. David said, "I just hope when I get old and live in a Nursing Home that children will visit me." Then Joby said, "I know. I've been thinking the same thing." Chip and John discussed what adopting means--"it means you care about someone enough to want to help them."*

Whatever learning has resulted, the P. K. Yonge-Hillhaven project is obviously fun for the children and their Adopted Grandparents.



YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN

The goodbye party for Grandma Edwards ceremonialized, in a hectic but happy fashion, an event most of the residents only dream of: going back home. In just one year, while death released four, only two of the thirteen "adopted" patients were able to go home.

When you are young it is easy to move from place to place, or, looking ahead, to quote Tennyson's resounding words: "Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul, as the swift seasons roll." In fact, some older people make the transition from their own homes to a nursing home in a graceful and adaptable spirit, perhaps finding in their own mental resources some compensation for lacks in their new environment. But for many, the move to a nursing home is traumatic: an uprooting from a beloved or at least familiar place, perhaps a symbol of some final rejection. Research showing a sharply reduced survival rate among older people who enter nursing homes involuntarily, as compared with those who do so of their own free will, emphasizes the powerful effects of the attitudes residents bring with them into their new surroundings.

Of course, a resident who never looks back to the places and people of former years is a fugitive from his own past--or a candidate for Nirvana. But one of the pathetic features of nursing home life is the impression of uprootedness created by the yearning for home. Perhaps the sharpest challenge facing personnel in nursing homes, as well as volunteers who undertake various projects with the aged, is the creation of a new sense of community to help reduce this displaced feeling among the residents.

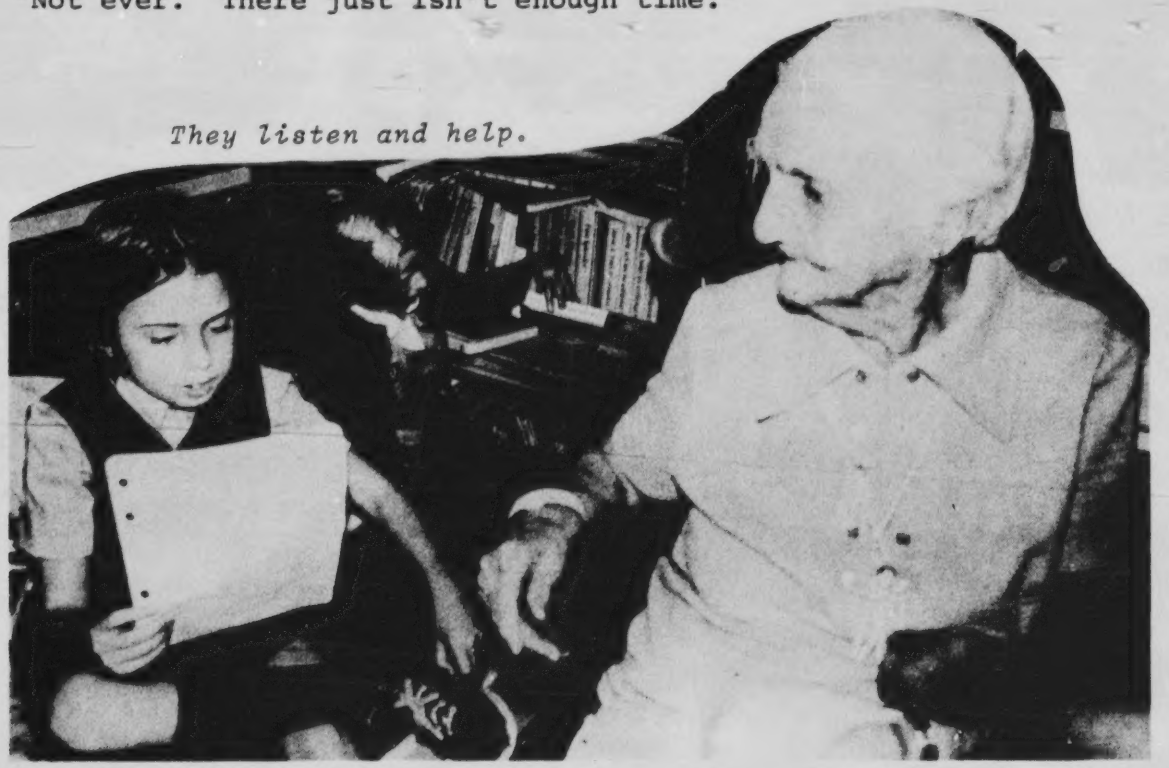
The fortunate resident has family members who provide some continuity between the old life and the new through their regular visits and unwearying concern. Some residents' families, however, are unwilling or unable to provide this attention; in some cases, the resident has no surviving kin. Such circumstances, which may intensify a sense of uprootedness, make the concept of adoptive love even more significant. Sensing the need, parents of the "adopted" children occasionally share in regular visits and in seeing that their children visited also to fill gaps during holidays.

C. S. Lewis has distinguished between "need love" and "gift love", while recognizing that many relationships contain elements of each. Comments in the logbook of this project give the impression that the affection created by the P. K. Yonge-Hillhaven project represents "gift love" on the part of

the children and "need love" on the part of the residents. Certain exceptions to this pattern are found: Grandma Songbird's conscious efforts to teach the children about her handicaps not only supplied her with an admiring audience but offered helpful insights to the children--in particular, to a handicapped child; and it is quite possible that some residents participated enthusiastically in games with the children not because they liked the games but because they liked the children.

The log account does appear to highlight the grandparents' need for love rather than their ability to provide the children with love, and the children's consciousness of grandparents' needs rather than needs of their own. Yet, much evidence that the gift/need relationship is brought into balance by the program is found in letters written about the "grandparents" by the children. Comments frequently included are *We help them and they help us. . . . We like to play with them and they like to play with us. . . . They teach us things and we teach them things.* Of all the "gifts" that one might possibly conceive, time to watch and listen and respond may be the most valuable contribution the "grandparents" made to these children. This seems even more probable when we acknowledge what a busy place homes are these days, particularly since in so many instances both parents must work. Children need an adult audience. *Not right now, Dear, I'm busy* too often means "Not ever. There just isn't enough time."

They listen and help.



49

Our adopted grandparents have the necessary time, the inclination, and the love to listen and to help. The log records that on November 1 Gathin took his math down to get help from Grandma Bevis. She really felt good that he got all of his math. *I didn't help at all--just checked it for him.* He said, *I'll bring more math to do with you.* On February 18, the log notes that Grandma Edwards was especially proud of their writing. She noticed that they were spelling more words correctly.

Many such anecdotes indicate that some grandparents participated a great deal in such activities; others remained aloof from them. It may be that the insistence of some residents on making gifts of money to the children was one expression of grandparents' desire to return their affection in some tangible way. Grandma Mocha made twelve dozen, old-fashioned sugar cookies for them at Christmas. Each tree, Santa Claus, and star was carefully decorated. *They'll keep, Mrs. Whitley. I made them with pure butter.* To regard these gifts merely as a reward or as an attempt to buy love seems a distortion of the motives involved.

The reluctance of some children to leave when their time is up, or their desire to make additional visits, indicates more strongly than words that they derived something important from the time spent with their "grandparents". Although not prone to outbursts of verbal appreciation, their spontaneous actions provide a thread through the labyrinth of unexpressed feelings. Some of the "gift love" expressions that occur may conceal hidden depths of "need love" beneath the surface. *Grandma Clark will be lonely if she doesn't see me.* Such a statement, underlining a child's sense of obligation to carry through with the visits, suggests a conscious feeling of being needed, even a certain innocent self-congratulation. Would the child be equally lonely if she missed a visit with "Grandma" Clark? The logbook is silent on this point relative to this child. But disappointment of children at not getting to visit is frequently recorded. *Grandma Carter had gone to the hospital. Joby sat in the corner today and seemed very sad. He said he just didn't feel like joining any games.*

The supervisor comments that the child's visiting *seems to meet a real need for 'Grandma'*, and "Grandma's" own words appear to substantiate this judgment: *I love this little girl so very much, she is bringing happiness into my life.* But is "Grandma" also bringing happiness into the life of the child? Volumes of letters written by the children to their "grandparents" provide some evidence that the relationship is equally as satisfying to the children:

Dear Grandma Weismer,

How are you? I am glad I know you. Do you like it at the Nurseinghome? I do. Happy New month! Can you come to our classroom? I hope so. Our fish died not too long ago. I hope I can come to the Nurseinghome today.

Love, Nadia

Dear Grandma Howard,

I am sorry about your hip. I hope you can get out of the Hospetel soon so I can se you. I haen't been to the nursing home yet but I will soon. I can't wait to see you again. Take care of yourself.

Joe.

Dear Grandma Harard,

I have heard about your hip. I hope it gets better soon. I like you very much. You are a good grandma and you are pretty.

love Jonathan

Dear Grandma Harward.

I love you. I hope you have a nice time. I am so happy that it is your birthday. I hope you live mamy more years. You are a very nice Grandparent.

love Jonathan

Dear Grandpa Young,

I am very glad that you will be our grandpa this year like you were last year and I hope you will have a very nice winter and I also hope that we will be adle to visit you every day that we are in school. see you soon

love, Suzanna

I like the adoped Grndparents they help us we help them the onl thing i like abouut the adoped program is that we lern from they and they lern from us

Love Weton

The logbook's accumulation of comments like that of "Grandma" Clark, *God bless you children for all the things you do for me*, leads one to picture a greater degree of emotional dependence and vulnerability among the grandparents than among the children--unless the facility with which these feelings are sometimes expressed causes one to feel a certain skepticism as to their depth. But the measurement of love has defied the efforts of great novelists and philosophers over the centuries: how much harder to sift the motives behind statements set down in an informal class project?

Whatever weight one attaches to them, it is impossible to overlook the expressions of love and appreciation that occur. Neither can one ignore the recurring expressions of the desire to go home. An old man talks about the birds in his back yard; he declares that he will keep the children's letters to take back home with him. Other residents echo this expectation. It is not possible to judge whether these comments voice a firm hope or a wistful illusion. The two things keep appearing and seem somehow related--the desire to go home and, at the same time, the desire to give the children's visits some kind of permanence. One old lady has the children sign her diary each time they come. The children are not immune to this desire to arrest the passing moment. Learning of the death of "Grandma" Glassboro, whom she had seen the previous day, one child said, *I wish yesterday had lasted forever.* It is not only the old who look back with regret and wish for a greater measure of permanence.

Perhaps it is this desire for permanence that prompts the frequent statements, from both children and adults, about some token of affection: *I'll always keep this.* But the old people's remarks take on special poignancy when they declare, *I'll take this home with me.* The nursing home is a temporary lodging place. Home is somewhere else. Because they have come to the nursing home, the children have somehow acquired a place in that mysterious "home" for which the aging yearn.

OUR ECHOES ROLL

A formal evaluation of this program began with objectives conceived in terms of children's attitudes toward the elderly. An over-all assessment of the program, however, must take into account the fact that others besides children were affected by it. Old people experienced happiness and, at times, disappointment because of hopes raised by the program; the supervising teacher felt the ups and downs of the visits; the teenage assistants, whether volunteers or education interns, were obliged by their presence to interact with children and with old people as well as with the supervising teacher and nursing home staff. An appraisal of the program's achievements must highlight the children's involvement, but such an appraisal cannot end at that point because the program itself did not. In this project, as in so many areas of life,

> *Our echoes roll from soul to soul*
> *And grow forever and forever.*

Yet, it is not possible to capture every nuance of an ongoing program, whose actual impact, pro or con, is not always expressed. Beneath the appreciative exclamations of the older people and the occasionally striking comments of the children, there is much that is NOT being said. This fact makes it necessary for program evaluators to read between the lines without reading too many of their own preconceptions into program accounts.

Those who set in motion the P. K. Yonge-Hillhaven program have an obligation to judge both the academic and emotional benefits it may confer. At the same time, these planners are in the situation described by one of Chekhov's characters in the declaration that only God knows what our work really is. Rational planning and appraisal must be present, but they cannot account for the total meaning of any work that involves human relationships. As one parent noted, *My son is a different person because of his visits to the nursing home. I hope the school will continue to provide this opportunity as he moves on to higher grade levels.* And how do you measure learning in a six-year-old who takes it upon himself to see that everyone shakes hands with Grandpa Richmond. *He's had a stroke, you know. Be sure to shake his hand and squeeze it all you can. We're trying to exercise his arm.*

Educators from elsewhere sometimes accompany the group, and aides and interns take part. Several logbook entries emphasize the contribution of high school volunteers, and at least one speaks of a university student who came back depressed, having failed to understand the objectives of the

program. One entry notes, *Children and grandparents had a good time but high school students didn't--bothers me! Am sure our children have different attitudes about older people.* The nursing home director confirmed the fact that, indeed, these "adopted grandchildren" did feel differently. Other groups came bearing gifts and song. Once having delivered their offerings from a "safe" distance, they left--only to return weeks or months later to again "do good" from a distance.

Even superficial involvement with the project appeared to foster a definite emotional reaction of delight, sadness, or fluctuations between the two. The reactions of at least one of those young adults who participated over a period of several weeks indicate that the program has a potential at least for modifying their attitudes toward the elderly in a positive direction. *The very first time I went to the nursing home I was so uncomfortable--almost scared--of all the residents. It made me feel even more inadequate to see the children and realize that they had the situation under control. All I could see at that point were the negative aspects of life in a nursing home. I had only been at a place like that once before in my life; I saw my grandfather for the last time in a <u>place like that</u>. I didn't accept it too well then, and it seemed I'd never feel good to be there.* This account, setting forth a frank sense of resistance on the part of a student/teacher, reminds us that many people hold strong assumptions about the aging process and nursing homes--possibly deriving from their own past experiences.

Two things are of special interest: The fact that sad associations of the past can be modified by involvement in the present, and the fact that interaction between children and both teenagers and young adults was enhanced as the group moved outside the classroom. It appears that the generation gap reduced or removed by this program has a multifaceted nature, separating teenagers from children and from the aged. Barriers first viewed simply in terms of childhood versus old age demand reappraisal as teenagers themselves recognize the walls that have fenced them off from the age groups above and below them.

What did the old people and the teenagers talk about? What questions did children and teenagers discuss? The log-book is silent on these points but one conclusion emerges clearly in a teenager's report: *It helped me to know myself better as well as the problems of the aged.* One high school volunteer assisted in the nursing home visits throughout the academic year and, on her own, continued to take children to visit regularly during the summer, although school was not in session. In selecting an institution to attend for higher education, one criterion she used in making her decision was whether or not there was a convalescent home nearby. Another,

I don't remember at what point my feelings changed.

55

a twelfth grade boy who also went as often as possible, stated, *I just can't get it all done down there.* His commitment became so devoted that he did not hesitate to give directions to the nursing home staff. Any irritation the staff may have felt toward him was never evident.

Who are the young adults who take part in the program? Some are prospective teachers assigned to P. K. Yonge School for an internship; others are volunteers from the U. F. Samson program--students who may or may not be interested in education as a career. How do they perceive the program?

It is a tribute to the P.K.Y.-Hillhaven program that some of the "instinctive" aversion to age felt by young adults may have been reduced. *I don't remember at what point my feelings changed. I guess I just realized that the grandparents were really people with the same kinds of problems and needs as everyone else.* This new understanding extended to the children as well: *The walk to and from the nursing home was always kind of a special time. I really got to know the children better because of it. We'd talk and socialize in an atmosphere different from that of the classroom. On the way back, we would usually reflect on things that happened during the visit. They asked questions and we'd discuss them.* It may well be that in the dialogues that occurred at this time, the children were able to transmit something of their own insights to the young person preparing to be a teacher. Just as they were able at times to act as teachers of the very old, perhaps they were also able to guide the younger adults who took part in the program. Simply by raising questions, they may have forwarded a learning process in the minds of their escorts.

These speculations are not intended to reduce the significance of traditional teaching by adults, young or old, but to draw attention to the less frequently recognized teaching initiated by children themselves.

> *5/30 Joby and John helped our blind Grandma Songbird play ring toss. I doubt that many adults would have attempted this. She estimated distance by their voices. They combined their encouragement until she could ring more than 50 percent.*

When it was time to leave, the children pushed their grandparents into a room set up for a "Carnival" by University of Florida students. I had to pull each child away. It did look like great fun. On the way out, Joby remarked, *This makes me not dread getting old. In fact, I think I will like it.*

This makes me not dread getting old.

If psychologists are correct in judging that children under the age of 10 have difficulty in formulating accurate concepts of time, perhaps this "ignorance" functions as a protective device enabling them to see old people without experiencing the fears that seem more immediate to the young adult. In some curious way, children may possess a certain authority because of what they do not yet know about the wheel of life. Young adults, on the verge of being caught up by this wheel, have less freedom of perception. They have not experienced a great deal more than the children, but they have experienced enough to regard aging in a threatening light. It is possible that a project of this nature can reduce some of the barriers to understanding that arise at different points in the span of life. If this occurs, however, it will happen because the type of learning sought is viewed in emotional as well as intellectual terms. The truest education is the education of the emotions: including but not limited to education of the intellect.

59

When learning is extended beyond classroom walls, it becomes impossible to predict the situations that children will encounter. The novelty of the unforeseen adds a peculiar flavor to the learning process--but when the new experience appears in a dangerous or threatening light, the charm of the unexpected yields to the enigma of a seemingly random force that defies interpretation.

> *5/2 I went down feeling very 'let down', but as soon as we got there things were better. 'Grandma Songbird' was waiting, and she helps us understand so many things. As the children were pushing her down the walk her wooden leg fell off. I was terrified, but she very calmly told us that it happens all the time. Then, she showed us how she uses it and explained the purpose (to steady herself so that she can stand on it and get from wheelchair to bed and to the toilet). She showed us where both legs are off--talked about using what you have--children were very interested and it was great for me--also it made her feel most helpful that she could help us to accept and know about handicaps.*

"I'll make do with the other 999."

I may think you don't love me if you don't write.

5/16 Grandma Chitty was in a real bad mood--she was fussing and even hitting some of the other residents. The children were so kind to her and remarked, "Grandma Chitty doesn't really mean to be mean she just doesn't know what she is doing." They were not upset at all--just wanted to help.

One would not necessarily assume in advance that a certain adopted grandmother would manifest a strong interest in the reading and writing of "her" children. Perhaps it is a novelty for the child to realize that someone other than a teacher or parent is concerned about progress made in such learning. The logbook makes it clear that Grandma Wirrick felt a sense of involvement with children's academic skills: *She always shows real interest in their reading . . . Christie writes more, reads more and makes more things at art centers all because of Grandma Wirrick.* The log report mentions that Grandma Wirrick *really motivates Christie to write.* The motivation described may relate more about Grandma herself than the child: *I may think you don't love me if you don't write.*

This emphasis upon the personal meaning of a child's written message appears with almost magical overtones during Grandma's illness: *She kept saying that their cards and letters helped to get her well.* The significance attached to the written word of the child extends to other gifts as well: *Grandma Wirrick cried when she showed me the mug Michael gave her. She said, "I'll guard this pretty mug."* It becomes apparent that the emotion attached to words and objects is an outward and visible sign of inward states of mind: *The minute that Michael walked into the room Grandma Wirrick felt better. She had been depressed but said, "Oh, my boy is here." She showed him all the things she got for Christmas.* Even more striking is this example of Grandma Wirrick's priorities: *She had a medical appointment changed so that she wouldn't miss Michael's visit.* In some manner that defies rational analysis, the gifts and especially the presence of a child take on a healing quality which traditional medicine lacks.

But then Grandma died, almost as unexpectedly as Grandma Glassboro had died. The teacher/director of the project felt the children accepted this loss better than she did. During the visit when she received this news, she refrained from telling the children but withdrew for a while to water the flowers, which were "almost dead from lack of water." Elsewhere she notes, *I've found that I can't possibly work with the project without becoming completely involved personally--this was a very special 'grandmother' who told us each visit how much she loved us and how much we meant to her.* When at length the teacher told the children

about this unforeseen event, she noted, *They were most kind and understanding--much better than I was.*

Going to the nursing home on the day of the funeral hour for their friend, however, the children were unusually subdued: *Children aren't talking as much about Grandma Wirrick's death--seems it is hurting them more--especially Michael. (Later -- Michael's mother called to say that Michael went to Mass to say a prayer for Grandma Wirrick.)* Similarly, a child named Maria, after hearing of Grandma Glassboro's death, had said, *Since she is part of our family we should do something for the funeral.* Adults whose impulse is to shield children from funerals might give thought to these reactions of Michael and Maria. The children, of course, were not alone in their feeling. The residents on Grandma Wirrick's wing of the nursing home were especially depressed, and Grandma Songbird suffered from a pain around her heart. (The children were relieved when she assured them this was probably not a sign of serious illness.)

When children fall silent after the death of a friend, it is difficult to understand exactly what the experience means to them. A cause and effect relationship is observed: death is followed by silence, not only of the deceased but of the living. The phenomenon is beyond the control of program participants, reminding those who regard these visits as a learning experience that the lessons taught may defy human understanding. In our efforts to demythologize death, it is important not to make the mistake of denying or minimizing it when it occurs. A special burden of interpretation falls on both the individual engaged in learning from the nursing home program and on those who direct, with however light a hand, the learning that takes place.

Most children have never even seen a dying or dead person. People seldom die at home these days. Following death, the body is taken from the hospital to the funeral home to the cemetery. Children, shielded from the mourning, are frequently sent away to visit a few days with those less directly affected. Upon returning to the scene children miss the loved one and often wait for his return; hence, ignorance, mystery, and myth are perpetuated. The cycle which causes us as adults to be unwilling or unable to cope with the realities of death continues. Breaking the cycle has become one of the objectives of the program.

Some "grandparents" die each year. Relating the biological facts and the psychological reactions to the experience of a dead pet or animal friend, a basis for discussion of the entire life cycle is established. Students observe seeds as they germinate, grow, reproduce themselves, and die. Observations of the meal worms, moths, and butterflies throughout their natural stages are discussed in relation to

changes in our own bodies as we grow and mature. "Grandparents" have lived longer; hence, we observe their skin is different and their hair is turning white. Discussion of these pertinent observations helps children recognize that aging is continuous from the day we are born. Thus, the fact that our bodies die becomes as easy to accept as the fact that we are born.

The first experience of a death of an "adopted grandparent" occurred late in November. The children had visited her each week since school began in September. She seemed to sense the imminence of her death, each week giving one of the children something: *I want you to plant this poinsettia to remember me by. . . . You take care of this African violet for me.* She even returned the mug one of them had made for her.

Regardless of a person's beliefs about spiritual immortality, it is common among people of all ages to desire some kind of social immortality. For a few individuals it may be a matter of one's impact on history. We read about national and world leaders who are consciously aware of how historians may deal with them, and who, consequently, behave with that in mind. A more common instance is a person who, even though retiring, doesn't want his office, shop, or plant changed too radically during his lifetime. Parents expect and yearn for indications that they will be remembered by members of their family after death. Though their physical traits are transmitted through genes, they want evidence that other aspects of themselves have had significant impact on their children. They want certain members of the family to have cherished times or property which have meaning for them. Psychologists tell us the basic unspoken desire--indeed, the assumption--is that handling an object previously owned or given by us will remind the person of us . . . that it will insure that the deceased or removed cannot be forgotten as long as that object is there to remind others of him.

We had a delightful visit the week before Thanksgiving. "Grandma" talked about the Halloween party we had shared and asked if we could have a special Thanksgiving party. On our last visit she requested special songs and games. The mutual concern and affection between adopted grandparent and grandchildren terminated in the usual "hugs and goodbyes". During the night "Grandma" died.

Feeling much anxiety, I broke the news to the class the next day, *Grandma died last night.* The discussion which followed was tearful for all of us--teacher and children. Certainly, the loss of a loved one is a time for grief, and the grief must be experienced.

Discussion began with statements expressing regret: *They will put her in the ground. . . . We will never see her again. . . .* Regret gave way to reflection: *Is it like*

sleeping forever? . . . We will miss her. . . . She was a really good grandma. . . . I wish yesterday could have lasted forever. . . . Just think what a good last day we gave her--we made her very happy. They recalled things to remember her by: *She liked to go to the play room with us. . . . She helped Christie with her reading. . . . She said we brought sunshine when we came to see her. . . . We fussed about who would get to sit on her bed beside her. . . . She sure was pretty.* Then from reflection to reality: *She lived a long time. . . . Her heart stopped beating. . . . Everyone is going to die sometime. . . . Now, we need to decide what to do. She was part of our family.*

Each wrote a letter to the real family. Typically the letters were filled with feelings of love and sympathy.

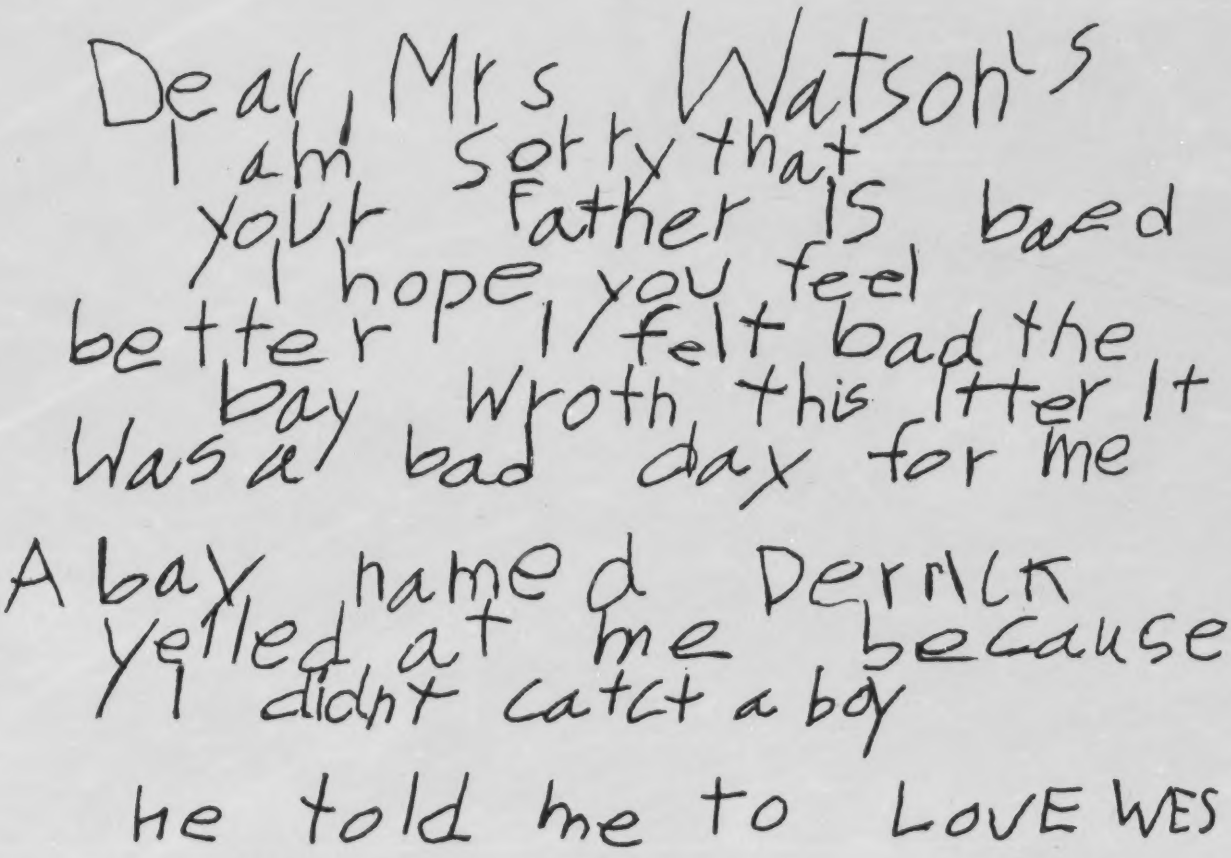
> *Dear Family of our Adopted Grandmother,*
>
> *I am sorry that she died. I know you loved her. I loved her too. All of our class loved her. I know you will miss her. We will miss her too. We liked to go and see her. We liked to sing and play with her. We were there the day before she died. She had a good time. I had a good time. Mrs. Whitley loved her.*
>
> *I love you, Sibylle.*

In the family's response they said, *Letters from the children helped more than anything else.*

The experience was followed through in the classroom with discussions about dying and burial, and the selection about burial customs from Life and Death (10) was read. Embalming, coffins, and funerals were discussed. Most of the children had never been to a funeral. Maria, whose grandfather had died during the summer, told what she knew about funerals and how they put her grandfather into the ground. Sarah's father had died during the summer before she became one of the participating pupils. Her mother had spoken to the teacher of her concerns that, although Sarah's older brothers and sisters had been able to talk about the loss, Sarah had not. After the discussion relative to the death of the first grandparent, Sarah's mother reported that the child's entire demeanor at home had changed dramatically. In class she became a resource about cremations as her father's body had been cremated. In writing letters of sympathy to families of other grandparents who died during the year, each time she stated, *I know just how you feel because my father died last summer.*

The children were better prepared when another grandmother died. They knew she wore a heart pacer, and she had talked with them freely about it. *Her heart wore out. . . . I'm glad she didn't have to hurt a lot.* Flowers they themselves selected from the florist were sent, since she was without a family to whom they could write. Why Did He Die? (5), The Dead Bird (2), and The Mother Tree (9) were all read and discussed.

Perhaps the learning that took place may be traced indirectly, in a situation involving not their own loss but a later bereavement suffered by someone else--one of the teachers whose father died. The following letters of condolence, selected from among those written by the children, may suggest how the program (including the deaths that occurred) has influenced the young participants to communicate some insights that grew out of their earlier period of silence. Indeed, in this sense, Grandma Wirrick "really motivates" the children to write.


Dear, Mrs Watson's
I am Sorry that
your Father IS baed
I hope you feel
better I felt bad the
bay Wroth this ltter It
Was a bad dax for me
A bax named Derrick
yelled at me because
I didnt catct a bax
He told me to LOVE WES

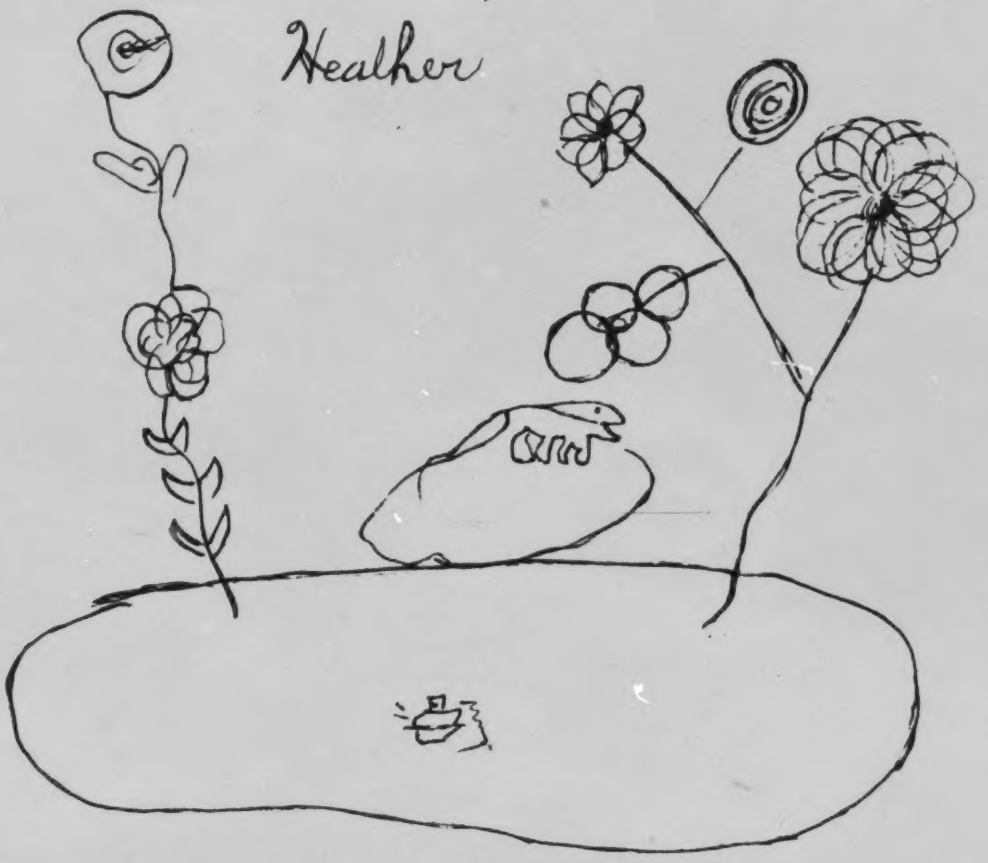
Dear mrs. Watson.
I am Sorry
That your Father
Died. Today was
a good day. We
did a lot of
Fun things. It
Was pretty neat
I Wish your Father
did not die. Well
every Body dies
Some Time

Derrick

Dear Miss Watson

I thnk its sad
wher somebody dies. I knows
how yoi feel, all my grandparents
are dead eceptone. One of our
adopted grandparents died.

Heather



Dear Mrs. watson, I am very very sorry that your father died but Don't think of bad things Just think of good things. I hope you feel better. "I hope I never get cancer

Love John carnes

FROM SALLY

Dear Mrs. Watson
I would like to
see you I am hew
At P.K. I think
that I Will enjoy
you And We Will
Probably like
each other.
We Will Work
to gether the
Work Will be
good

Dear Mrs. Watsan,

I am so sorry
that your father died.
my GrandFather died too.
But just think aboat
Good things like when
you were in fifth
Grade you were
with all of your
Frinds.

Love, David

EDUCATION OF THE SPIRIT: AN EPILOGUE

"You are my sunshine." The words of this familiar song, sung by the children at the request of Grandma Glassboro on the day before she died, offer a symbol of the program as a whole. It is clear that the program has borne abundant fruit: not only in the garden tended by the children for their old friends but also in the good cheer they brought with them.

But the illumination derived from this project has touched the young as well as the old. In its light, each participant can be seen with greater clarity as an irreplaceable individual. At times the light may seem to waver: a beloved resident dies or (very infrequently) returns home; a key staff member at the nursing home moves to a distant state; a number of children move on to a classroom with new projects and new involvements. But a certain continuity remains, and the program returns to life and adapts itself to altered circumstances.

I love all these children and they love me and color makes no difference.

A constant feature has been the unfaltering attention of a teacher whose combination of humor and serious intent wins the acceptance of nursing home residents and staff. Without the continued presence and commitment of such a person, the program could hardly grow and blossom as it does. Her belief in an important P. K. Yonge School principle--that learning should not be confined to a formal classroom environment--stimulates children to step into extended family relationships that some lack in their own homes. The idea of love as an obligation voluntarily, even joyfully, undertaken supplements the more obvious biological understanding of family life. Grafting this new concept onto a familiar growth, the program results in the flowering of love and learning. Music, games, crafts, and imagination serve to nurture these qualities in both the young and the old.

Some barrier between school and society, self and others, breaks down when children leap over a nursing home wall. This experience vindicates the idea that community involvement, undertaken in a constructive and intelligent fashion, greatly extends the possibilities for learning that are open to children.

As the classroom expands to include "real" life, learning moves in unpredictable directions. An element of the population that society often treats with overt or ill-concealed contempt is discovered to be alert, mentally vigorous, and far more capable of laughter than many of the rest of us.

Of course, not all the unexpected occurrences were positive in nature. A tendency to sentimentalize old age receives a sharp check in the reactions of one old man, supposedly enthusiastic about the program, who lashed out at children bringing him gifts. What combination of forgetfulness, temperament, or ill health contributed to this reaction remains a mystery. New directions can exhibit the potentially destructive as well as the more hopeful aspects of human nature. Old age has tragedies not chronicled in this project's logbook; childhood has tragedies of its own which may never be expressed but which may surface after long silence to haunt one's later years. Neither old nor young are immune to sorrow, but a teacher who is aware of the perils as well as the promises of new directions, and who does not fear the unknown as such, will search for ways to turn unforeseen negative happenings into a positive experience.

The intellectual training we traditionally associate with school acquires more meaning when it is linked with an emotional investment. Attempts were made to include academic learnings in relation to the elderly as indicated by a log entry on May 4.

Today we had a special class to explain terms, equipment, characteristics of some older people. Children listened and asked many good questions but soon got tired and wanted to go to visit their grandparents. Also, as Mrs. Storti talked about different symptoms of some older people, the children became very defensive about their own adopted grandparents. John quickly corrected, "Grandpa Crevasse never does that." Danni said, "Grandma Songbird would never be that way." Melek said, "You must mean these things happen to really old people and maybe sick ones." It was interesting because Grandma Howard will be 96 next month. They used her for an example--"She is so pretty, dresses so well, has her hair fixed so pretty all the time and always talks with good sense."

Bed pans and wheelchairs are taken for granted. "These are just hospital things," the children explain. Mrs. Storti is planning another class to discuss strokes, heart attacks, and other ailments of the aged.

In honesty, one must add that this psychic expenditure is demanded of the supervising adults as well as the participating students and the old people who are not merely the passive recipients of affection. The teacher/director, in fact, is sometimes harder hit by the currents of an age-youth project than the young people who actually carry it out. Placed in the middle, he or she must cope with the logistics of planning and organizing while seeing all too clearly the confusion experienced by the young and the losses suffered by the old.

But the possibility of pain cannot be eliminated from any emotional investment, and the emotional investment of both children and adults in the P. K. Yonge School nursing home program could be ruled out only at the expense of the learning we seek. When balanced by an effort to understand our experiences and observations, this emotional response heightens rather than negates an intellectual response. A formal classroom setting can spark intellectual awareness; emotional response is likely to be ignited by a confrontation with the society surrounding the classroom.

Rufus Jones has written of the need to balance contemplation and action to achieve a deeply rooted spiritual life. American public schools, with their pupils' diversity in heritage, have a special obligation to respect separation of

church and state. This obligation, however, should not blind us to recognition that the truest education is the education of the spirit, and that our pressing social issues--our society's economic and ecological conflicts, its treatment of minorities, and the relationships of its young and its old--are basically spiritual problems. Instead of paralyzing our ability to deal with these problems, our nation's religious diversity should provide multiple insights and resources to deal with them. Realization that spiritual education can take place in the secular setting of our public schools may assist us in preparing children to solve problems that have perplexed our own generation.

Education of the spirit is, of course, notoriously difficult to assess. It is one thing to measure attitude changes; the significance of the changes may be more elusive. A sensitive teacher knows, however, that acquisition of facts and skills is most meaningful when related to an individual's objectives, and that his objectives expand when his ethical and imaginative being is touched. While the public school must refrain scrupulously from the grinding of denominational axes, it can remain aloof from spiritual values only by counting itself out of the learning process that has the greatest light to offer a confused society.

More specifically, what light is cast by the program just described? Evaluation of the project's effectiveness poses certain difficulties. On a superficial level, it is easy to say that the program is successful. It brings young and old together in a setting that is usually cheerful, and it serves to alleviate the loneliness that so often accompanies institutional life. It allows greater mobility for old people who are dependent on young muscles for their wheelchair "walks". It also provides a listening ear for the reminiscences that some old people enjoy. (Catalogues of the aches and pains and economic burdens that often accompany old age did not, apparently, form the gist of these messages.) It offers an opportunity for games and crafts that may help arthritic hands and for music and conversation with children whose vitality is in itself morale-raising. The noise and motion of the young people, if not permitted to get out of hand, creates a refreshing contrast for old people keenly aware of their own physical limitations. The program may even help some residents overcome these limitations: Children's involvement in speech therapy and handwriting exercises for stroke patients may lead to improvement although no medical opinion on this point is available. Notable though less dramatic progress may be traced in an increased readiness of old people to get up, get dressed, and pay more attention to personal appearance as a result of the children's visits. Children are very observant about such details, and at least one child spoke approvingly of one resident's dignified and well-groomed appearance.

I trust you girls to push me anywhere.

I just hope that when I get old and live in a nursing home that children will visit me.

I'm going to ask the teacher for some new grandchildren.

The supervisors strive to maintain a balanced view of program expectations. Consequently, the program is free from the "do-good" atmosphere sometimes found in some church or club projects for the aged. The old people are on the giving as well as the receiving end of the program transactions, tangible and intangible. The logbook records a number of gifts; harder to capture is the spirit of concern and love that accompanied them.

A first reaction to records of the project is that old people--despite the balance finally achieved--did derive more from the visits than did the children. Their expressions of appreciation are frequent, and the old people often mention how much they miss the children when the visits are delayed for some reason. The children's comments do not reflect the same sense of dependence, but children are less apt to verbalize such feelings; however, their reluctance to leave older friends is noted on numerous occasions. While it does not appear that children actively sought from "grandparents" a solace or guidance not available from other sources, on at least some occasions a genuine influence was exerted. One troubled child, whose entry into the program created misgivings on the part of school personnel, apparently found the project a stabilizing influence. The supervisor ascribes this effect to the child's interaction with one grandparent in particular.

On a wider scale, the development of more positive attitudes toward the aging process is a significant gain by children who will, perhaps, help create a society less inclined than ours to reject and isolate its older members.

The emphasis on "adoption" of the grandparents--a concept taken quite seriously by the children--may have been helpful to adopted children taking part in the program. Though clear evidence on this point is not available, a handicapped child was exposed to the highly constructive attitude of one grandparent who was not only confined to a wheelchair but who was blind as well. This woman's willingness to discuss her handicaps in a positive and matter-of-fact way had considerable impact on all the children who heard her speak.

In a quarrel that arose one day among several children, who all wanted to push their handicapped classmate's wheelchair, grandparents exercised kind but firm arbitration. Their fondness for their young visitors did not inhibit grandparents from correcting them on a number of occasions.

This quarrel about their classmate is the only evidence presented by logbooks for the presence of jealous and competitive feelings among the children except to take turns pushing grandparents. There is no evidence that children competed for the attention of an older person, but there

are a number of references to rivalry among old people for the attention of young visitors. Like plants struggling for their share of sunlight, the residents at times expressed resentment over what they interpreted as excessive attention to another resident. These expressions of antagonism suggest that the program holds greater urgency for the old people than for the children. They also raise questions about the attitudes of nursing home residents who are not included in the program.

But, one might ask, should a good program be criticized because it can not include all those who might profit from it? Certainly, a program begun on a modest scale by one classroom teacher cannot aim at complete coverage of a 100-patient nursing home, even if all the residents are able and willing to take part. A familiar syndrome appears: the promising program that creates expectations on a larger scale than it can meet. Visits to prison inmates, special services to the handicapped, and pilot programs in slum areas have generated similar problems of rising expectations. It is at this point that the greatest challenge to a small-scale program may occur: that of retaining its original scope or of widening it without losing the original character and impetus. In either case, a deliberate choice is involved but much of the choice may rest on people who are not directly connected with the program. If one classroom cannot form close ties to a large number of residents, a number of classrooms could. Further, the involvement of more schools would permit visits to more nursing homes. But the spread of a new program can meet with indifference, even opposition, because of heavy commitments that are already present or because of a distaste for exposure to public notice. Nursing homes whose programs would not stand close scrutiny would, perhaps, be reluctant to encourage regular visits from groups of observant and curious school children; at the very least, there might be an inclination to hand pick for participation those residents who are most docile and least likely to complain about abuses. Similarly, a school whose administration regards students and teachers as subjects to be controlled rather than as self-governing, trustworthy beings will be cautious about encouraging much community involvement.

The P. K. Yonge Laboratory School is fortunate in its atmosphere, which fosters unusual freedom of action on the part of teachers and students. Along with this freedom is recognized a responsibility to turn extramural activities into genuine learning situations. Schools run along rigid lines may be less oriented than P. K. Yonge toward the new directions taken by this project. Yet, a first step might serve not only to expose and correct weaknesses in the participating institutions but also to bring to light their

potential for fostering rich relationships among individuals. One of the most rewarding experiences for the pioneer of a new program is that of watching the growth of a genuine community spirit. With careful oversight, this ethos can develop into a hardy plant that will shelter many generations.

APPENDIX

PROJECT SUMMARY

Maintenance of an environment in which all may continue to be stimulated to grow requires broad participation in the lives and experiences of others. Optimum development of self and more satisfying identification with the human species--recognizing man's common needs for loving, belonging, expressing, sharing, creating, and producing--requires a full range of involvement, including the youngest and the oldest. The Adopted Grandparents Program is one effort toward establishing and maintaining a high level of involvement between a classroom of young children and the elderly residents of a nursing home. For all, involvement is fun and enlightening.

Background

Approximately 100 patients are in residence at the nursing home. Of the 100 only 13 are "adopted". In 1968, when the children's visits began, 12 "grandparents" were officially designated (no one now remembers why only 12 or who decided). But during one of their first visits, the children discovered and adopted "Grandma" Wiesmer; hence, the number "adopted" became 13. On the very few occasions when one has been "lost", another is "adopted" to fill the void.

Ages of the "grandparents" average between 75 and 80 years. The richness and variety in their life experiences are commensurate with those years. Among the 13 are a teacher, an actor, a railroad engineer, and a housemaid. One elderly gentleman is a Harvard graduate.

Purpose

The purpose of the project is to provide 30 six-, seven-, and eight-year-old children and 13 aged inhabitants of the nearby nursing home with mutually enriching experiences.

Program Description

Among both age groups objectives are (1) to stimulate sharing of talents, knowledge, and skills; (2) to encourage loving, caring, helping relationships; and (3) to recognize and accept the aging process. Objectives are accomplished primarily through integrating activities in language arts and

social studies. Accomplishment is demonstrated in a lot of talking and listening, reading and writing, sharing and caring, helping and loving, singing and shouting, playing and planting.

Initially, children visited only once or twice a week and wheeled "grandparents" to school for special occasions a couple times a year. Now, at least some of the children go every afternoon. It is a choice each is free to make or to reject, after having completed the "givens" of the school day.

Plans for each visit include activities in which the "grandparents" and "grandchildren" can share in groups as well as on a one-to-one basis. Some examples are craft centers, flower gardens, games, and singing. Emphasis throughout the year is on providing activities which promise to engage both age groups in similar interests, in helping relationships, and in friendship.

Some Activities

Visiting.--Just talking and listening to each other contributes to knowledge as well as skill. Grandparents enjoy hearing about school today, and children especially like to hear grandparents tell about the "olden days". Grandma Howard tells them about schools when she was a teacher; Grandma Songbird tells about "hard times being good times."

It is a "big treat" on the days that grandparents come visit the classroom. Individual grandparents come from time to time but come as a group near the end of the school year.

Writing.--Even though children visit daily, they frequently choose also to write letters or a poem to be hand delivered. As new youngsters enter the program each year their increase in verbal fluency becomes evident in the increased length of their creations and in the frequency with which they choose to write. The variety of topics and modes expand as well and come to include stories, plays, and accounts of events both in and out of school. The enthusiastic and critical response of the "grandparent" audience serves to encourage increased attention to correct mechanics and spelling as well as to the final appearance of a paper.

A record of much of the writing may be viewed in the children's weekly newspaper. Grandparents look especially for articles on news items about the project. Children read their newspaper for grandparents who can not read it for themselves.

Reading.--Many children read to grandparents who never could or can no longer read. Children particularly enjoy reading mail for their grandparents. Some grandparents, however, can and do help children with reading skills, taking considerable pride in the progress the children make.

Dramatizing.--Special occasions are not prerequisite to giving a play. The children can and do find many sources of inspiration. But, no party or holiday occurs without stimulating the creation of a play for live Thespians or puppets to present.

Parties.--Planning for parties for the grandparents serves as a particularly appropriate means for extending and reinforcing children's skills in mathematics. Grandparents also plan parties for the children. Both make decorations but the children usually serve the refreshments.

Sometimes grandparents plan special refreshments for the children. Each Easter, Grandpa Crevasse orders a hugh decorated Easter cake for the children, and the children provide a "wheelchair egg hunt."

Arts and crafts.--An arts and crafts area is set up at the nursing home so that grandparents can help to make special things for their rooms and to decorate for special occasions. Participation is invariably enthusiastic. The resulting physical therapy is a side benefit to the elderly. Just using their hands for cutting, pasting, molding, coloring, and painting is most beneficial. A high point occurred the day Grandpa Crevasse completed his collage turkey. He held it up and said, *This is the first turkey I ever made in my whole life*. Then he made two more to give his two "adopted" grandsons.

Planting a flower garden.--This is one of the most pleasurable activities. Early in September the children dig the garden and plant flowers around the patio at the Home. Replanting periodically keeps flowers blooming there throughout the entire year. Grandparents serve as advisors, choose varieties and types of flowers, and look on from wheelchairs as children work.

Children also plant potted plants and take them to grandparents for their rooms. Cut flowers are taken at least weekly--a rose, a carnation, whatever is available and inexpensive.

Making music.--Music is the most requested activity, and every visit includes singing. Grandparents love to sing with the children. They teach the children and the children teach them. Sound and singing games are popular, too. One of the favorites, "Little Sally Walker," was taught them by the blind adopted grandmother whom the children nicknamed "Grandma Songbird". Grandma Bennett taught them all "Jesus Loves Me". Grandpa Crevasse, retired from the railroad, requested "I've Been Working on the Railroad" most every visit. A college student frequently takes her quitar and joins the "sing alongs". Also, children help grandparents use rhythm instruments (very good for arthritic hands).

Games.--Grandparents are always ready and waiting to play games. A very special aspect of the games is the high degree of friendly competition. Children teach and grandparents teach. Favorites are checkers, old maid, ring toss, bean bag, and bingo.

The Study

During the 1974-1975 school year a study was conducted to identify the effects on the children's attitudes toward the elderly.

Instrumentation.--In order to collect such data a process was developed through which children were asked questions designed to determine reactions to pictures representative of various age groups.

All pictures were black and white, uniformly mounted on a neutral background, and laminated. Six viewers independently rated the pictures, categorizing them into three distinguishable age ranges--20 to 28; 36 to 45; 60 plus. The eleven pictures yielded were those which each of the raters agreed fell within a specific range. Each range contained both males and females.

Questions were designed and arranged to call for reaction to the person in the picture by having to move from a relatively "safe" distance--*If he/she said 'hello' to you as you passed on the sidewalk, would you say 'hello'?*--to being close--*Would you like to hug him/her?*

Questions were asked in the following sequence:

1. *If he/she said 'hello' to you as you passed on the sidewalk, would you say 'hello'?*

2. *Would you like to go to walk with him/her?*

3. *Would you like him/her to be your friend?*

4. *Would you share your cookies with him/her?*

5. *Would you like to sit in his/her lap?*

6. *Would you like to hug him/her?*

Testing sessions were held during pre-school planning. They were conducted pre and post by a person who had no responsibility for the project or contact with the children other than during the testing sessions.

Age range: 20-28

86

Age range: 60 plus

Age range: 36-45

Age range: 60 plus

89

Age range: 60 plus

90

Age range: 36-45

91

Age range: 20-28

92

Age range: 20-28

Age range: 36-45

94

Age range: 36-45

95

Age range: 60 plus

96

DATA ANALYSIS

This study was conducted in order to determine attitude changes in second and third grade students who were exposed to elderly persons and their milieu. Pre- and posttest data were obtained on these students (the experimental group with n = 17) and on students in the second and third grades without the planned exposure (the control group with n = 16).

The test data consisted of the number of positive responses to four elderly, three middle age, and four young photographs. Responses to six questions were obtained for each picture. Independent variables consisted of the treatment group (experimental or control), pre- or posttesting, grades (second or third), sex (male or female), and race (black or white). In addition, the child's exposure to elderly persons outside of the treatment experience in school was assessed by a personal interview with a parent.

As a primary focus, this study sought to determine if any differences existed between the experimental and control groups in their positive responses to the young, middle aged, and elderly persons' photographs when considering the variables of pre- and posttesting, sex, race, and grade. A secondary concern was whether the experimental and control groups differed from one another regarding exposure to elderly persons away from school.

The latter concern was analyzed through a personal interview with a parent. Results of the interview are presented in Table 1. Chi-square and $\underline{z}$ testing were conducted, but no statistical significant differences were discovered. The ages of the child's oldest neighbor and that of his grandparents supported the fact that both groups were acquainted with persons in the same elderly age group outside of the school. The age and prior educational experience (defined as having gone to nursery school) of the child were also very similar. One other question was asked of the parent. Its concern was whether the child spoke to his elderly neighbor. This was rated with a 1 if they talked frequently, 2 if seldom, and 3 if never. The mean for the experimental group was 1.87 and for the control group, 1.96.

Analysis of the primary focus of the study regarding differences between the experimental and control groups concerning the number of positive responses to the pictures was performed utilizing chi-square testing. No significant differences were found. While this was true, an examination of

TABLE 1

Means and Percents for Responses to the Personal Interview with Parents Regarding the Child's Home Exposure to Elderly Persons for the Experimental and Control Groups

Interview Categories	Experimental		Control	
	Mean	Percent	Mean	Percent
Age of Oldest Neighbor	63.2		67.7	
Maternal Grandparents:				
Age of Grandmother	61.2		56.5	
Age of Grandfather	61.9		58.3	
Child Visits:				
At least once a month		47.1		38.5
Less than once a month		52.9		61.5
Living Distance from Child:				
Less than 25 miles		23.5		15.4
More than 25 miles		76.5		84.6
Paternal Grandparents:				
Age of Grandmother	59.5		57.3	
Age of Grandfather	60.4		61.8	
Child Visits:				
At least once a month		53.3		40.0
Less than once a month		46.7		60.0
Living Distance from Child:				
Less than 25 miles		33.3		50.0
More than 25 miles		66.7		50.0
Child's Age	7.4		7.5	
Child Attend Nursery School				
Yes		82.4		71.4
No		17.6		28.6

each treatment group's positive responses to the elderly persons' pictures revealed a greater positive trend by the experimental group. These data are presented in percents in Table 2. On all categories, the experimental group exhibited more positive responses, proportionately, than the control group on posttesting. More positive responses on pretesting were expressed by the control group for second graders, white students, and male students. Overall, the percents for the experimental group increased from pre- to posttesting five times out of six whereas for the control group, it was two times out of six.

In summary, no statistical differences were found between the experimental and control groups on the data collected concerning the school or the home exposure to elderly persons. From the data, though, it appears that both groups, apparently, had the same background and attitudes initially, but the experimental group more frequently had attitude changes in a positive direction toward elderly persons.

TABLE 2

Percents and Number of Positive Responses to Elderly Persons' Photographs for the Experimental and Control Groups by Grade, Race, Sex, and Pre- and Posttesting

Categories	Experimental				Control			
	Percent		Number		Percent		Number	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Grade:								
Second	56.4	62.5	176	195	57.4	54.2	179	169
Third	80.2	71.9	77	69	70.8	59.7	51	43
Race:								
Black	83.3	87.5	60	63	59.4	63.5	57	61
White	57.4	59.8	193	201	60.1	52.4	173	151
Sex:								
Male	53.6	60.1	90	101	67.8	53.0	114	89
Female	67.9	67.9	163	163	53.7	56.9	116	123

REFERENCES

1. Boll, H. Group Portrait with Lady. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1973.

2. Brown, M. W. The Dead Bird. New York: W. R. Scott, Inc., 1965.

3. Frazier, A. "Individualized Instruction," Curricular Concerns in a Revolutionary Era. Reading from Educational Leadership, ASCD, Washington, D. C., 1971, p. 33.

4. Hanson, G. A. "Aging: A New Social Concern," Presbyterian Survey, November, 1972, p. 18.

5. Harris, A. Why Did He Die? Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Co., 1965.

6. Johnson, H. "Growing Old in a Youth-Oriented Throw-Away Society," Presbyterian Survey, November, 1972, p. 8.

7. Mitford, J. The American Way of Death. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963.

8. Stirling, M. The Wild Swan. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965.

9. Whitehead, R. The Mother Tree. New York: Seabury Press, 1971.

10. Zim, H. S., & Bleeker, S. Life and Death. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1970, pp. 40-50.